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Winter 1971/2

# Screen

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The British Film Institute has denied certain facts printed in the last number of *Screen* relating to the administration of the Institute and the way in which the Educational Sub-Committee conducted its enquiries. The Society did not check certain facts with the Institute before publication and conveys its regrets to the Governors and staff of the Institute for not having done so. A new relationship has been formed between SEFT and the Film Institute and we hope that we can look forward to a period of fruitful cooperation in which constructive criticism and debate may usefully take place.

### Foreword

The last number of *Screen* was devoted to a critique of the British Film Institute and the American Film Institute. Both Institutes experienced internal conflicts over matters of film education and general policy questions concerning the role of national film bodies.

In the United States the internal conflict at the American Film Institute did not remain purely administrative but was brought into the open and made public. Issues were pursued within education, within the industry, by the film journals and by the national, local and trade press.

In Britain only *Screen* among the film journals opened a critique of British Film Institute policies and administrative practice. The Society put much at risk in doing so since its finances and those of the journal are dependent upon a grant from the British Film Institute.

The purpose of *Screen's* critique was not destructive, was not aimed at making the Institute lose 'face' nor even public confidence. On the contrary, the aim was to bring out into the open issues and questions relating to film culture and film education which is the Institute's preserve and to have these matters debated fully and in public. Such an aim seems right and proper. The Institute is a public body, publicly funded.

The Chairman of the Institute has stated recently to Institute members that 'it is no bady thing for a body like the Institute

to have its work challenged from within and without from time to time'.

3

The Society welcomes this statement and looks forward to a response from the Institute to criticisms made for what is now required is debate of film education policies in which the Institute ceases to be an object of debate but becomes a participant in a debate.

The matter of the Society receiving a grant from the Institute is separate from the Society openly criticising the Institute. It would be stretching credibility if we refrained from criticism because we received money. Not only would the Society appear corrupt, but the Institute even more so. The first duty of the Society is to film education and film teachers *not* to the British Film Institute. Our existence financially may depend on the Institute but the reason for that existence is to serve the needs of the film education movement.

The Society has moved to new offices with the help of the British Film Institute and has been promised a grant of £9,994 by the Institute for 1972-1973. The Institute has stated that it will do all it can to see that this figure is attained. (The entire Institute budget is a draft budget subject to approval by the Department of Education and Science).

The Society is grateful for this financial sign of the Institute's confidence in our work and policies.

The General Secretary

The teaching of film as film is rare. More usually film is 'used' in other subjects or alien curricula. Even where taught the teaching is more ideology than an understanding of an artistic product. Attention is to 'content', what is signified, what is depicted, rather than to the manner of signification, to the modes of depiction.

Movies are in part responsible for the ideological readings given them. Though film 'represents' the world, is a mediation of it through a structure of signs, it often appears as an unmediated reflection or presentation. The technological apparatus of film-making (more and more refined) presents an appearance on the screen of an accurate reproduction of external reality. Film-making has an in-built realism. It is no accident that aesthetics of realism long since rejected for the other arts continue to dominate the most technically advanced art, in criticism, teaching and production, in part because of its technical 'superiority'.

*Screen* has chosen in this number to reproduce the debates and ideas of Soviet artists and film-makers of the 1920's for these debates are reflections upon and struggles with notions of 'realism' which *Screen* regards as crucial to any understanding of the cinema in the past and at the moment.

Two sorts of reality concerned Soviet artists - the reality of the artistic material (the sound, the letter, the word, the shot, the celluloid) and social reality, either (or both) as something the work of art depicted or as the context in which the art product functioned and had a place. This area of debate and concern was marked by confusion and struggle. The confusion is clear in the texts - the recurrence of terms such as 'objectivity', 'facticity', 'factography', 'material' used in double often treble senses. But the confusion was indicative of the struggles to preserve the formalist pre-revolutionary concern with artistic elements and the social and political necessities raised by the revolution. A revolution in art and thinking about art had simultaneously to be worked out with a revolution in society. The power of the cinema to reproduce reality brought these two aspects together in a very acute form revealing both a connection and a disparity and problematic. The issue was in part expressed and battled out over the question of the 'play' film and the 'unplayed' film, Eisenstein and Vertov, the staged *October* and the revolution itself, an actor-Lenin, the real Lenin.

What is clear in the debates is the complete awareness (no matter what position is adopted) that the signs of the cinema are signs, are mediations with their own particular structures and specificities. And such structures had to be understood as constructs not as simple reproductions of external reality. It was the beginnings of a science of cinema with an object of its own.

In Britain 'realism' dominates without question or reflection. The documentary tradition of the most mystified kind persists in film and television. Criticism orientates still towards content and signified and impressionist ravings. Film education is obsessed either with film 'themes' or the cinema's 'talents'. Theory and reflection are resisted at most levels — because these are threats. The resistance most often gets expressed in deep anti-intellectualism, accusations of dogma or in the retreat towards ' practicality ', the nitty-gritty, what we *really* need. Sometimes, at the very worst, the language is of creativity, the artist, art, intuition, the language for example of Free Cinema; of Lindsay Anderson.

Films made in the Soviet Union in the 1920's were not 'art' but part of a struggle in defining the specifics of the cinema. Films were both experiments and counters in a debate; they were also the practice of certain theories and the theorising of a practice. Practice and theory went together, as indeed they must, reflecting and modifying each other. There was not that divorce so evident in film education (and education generally) in this country between those who make things (the talented) and those who criticise (the tasteful). Such existent polarities — the precise practice in education — must be understood, exposed and destroyed and room made for a more fruitful synthesis. This in part is a matter of politics.

*Screen* most recently spoke of a 'politics of education' and a 'politics of film' without perhaps understanding fully the meaning of these terms.

It is not adequate to theorise or to struggle, say, for a more radical educational and film practice (as Soviet artists did) without precise attention being paid to how film culture and film education are organised and administered and to combat where necessary at this political level organisation and administration. Ideas, films do have immense power, but those in power have even more.

Some pointers through the work of Jean-Luc Godard  
Christopher Williams

*'The prevailing lack of clarity about their situation on the part of musicians, writers and critics has tremendous consequences, which are not sufficiently stressed. For since they think they possess an apparatus which in fact possesses them, they defend an apparatus over which they no longer have any control, which is no longer, as they believe, a means for the producer, but has become a means opposed to the producer'.* — Bertolt Brecht.

1

In a sense, the serious study of political cinema has always been inhibited by the aura which still surrounds its birthplace — post-revolutionary Russia. The diachronic version of Film History, in close association with the 'film language' approach, tended to establish Russian revolutionary cinema as not merely the model for a political cinema but as the fountainhead of 'artistic' cinema in general. The result of this strange amalgam was to create a critical situation of the widest confusion: the political elements of that cinema were mutated, probably under the joint influences of bourgeois liberalism and committed Stalinism, into a kind of vague humanism which could be trotted out at all convenient times and places; its technical, 'linguistic' elements became gospel; the films were buried in a highly reverential graveyard; the texts vanished completely. Eisenstein remained, of course, but for a-historical, and in that context virtually useless study — a totem. The illustrious founder of revolutionary cinema became the biggest single obstacle to its practice and its theory. It took history itself, in the shape of the French revolution of May 1968, to force a necessary re-evaluation of the whole concept of political cinema: a re-evaluation that is only just beginning.

In the aftermath of the revolution, *Cahiers du Cinéma* began to re-publish a wide selection of original Russian material; *Cinéthique* attempted a meditative praxis in the whole area of political cinema. These moves had their echoes in other cultures. At the same time, about 80 per cent (at a frivolous estimate) of young film-makers became 'revolutionaries' of one sort or another. This ferment was so disparate and various that it can't possibly qualify for descrip-

tion as a 'movement', running as it does the whole gamut from Warholian voyeurism through re-vamped social-concern 'realism' to agitational propaganda and sheer abstraction. The single common plank in all this work would appear to be a rejection of what are taken to be the norms of 'Hollywood', 'entertainment'-type film-making. But there was no agreement on what should be put in the place of these norms. Perhaps the most frequent suggestions were: a thinly-disguised new version of nineteenth century individualism - 'the soul of the author laid bare'; a more socialised version of the same thing, as in true-confession, talking straight into camera documentary (a technique obviously boosted by television); and, in contra-distinction to these two modes, attempts at a cinema that would be sophisticated technically, using elements from all the traditionally validated areas of cinema allied for the first time to an ideological armature that would be seen to be justifying itself throughout the whole procedure and process of making and seeing the film.

It goes without saying that there are enormous critical difficulties in attempting an analysis of this real fermentation, partly because of the ferocious anti-intellectualism of many of its practitioners, partly because established critical concepts (authorship, genre, etc) traverse the areas under discussion without establishing any points of contact. If we choose now to study the re-opened question of political cinema through the work of Jean-Luc Godard, it is because its more recent manifestations lie decisively within the third area of activity defined above, and because they are paralleled by interesting attempts to establish a new criticism in which political and aesthetic objectives might be held in a meaningful relationship with one another.

Our principal contention will be that Godard's cinema, for all its manifestly fragile qualities, constitutes an important link between the American-dominated cinema of the past and the politicised cinema of the future.<sup>1</sup> We must also confess to a sneaking desire to rescue the work from the love/hate pedestal on which bourgeois cinematic culture has enthroned it, and its author from the kind of false friend who loathed *Pierrot le fou* when it appeared, but five years later when confronted with *Pravda* looked back to the glorious era of *Pierrot*.

## 2

The only coherent way to defend and illustrate Godard's cinema as a whole is to see it as a cinema of consciousness, or as a cinema centring on consciousness. It is not a question of unified or homogeneous consciousness, but rather a multiplicity, a meeting-place of a whole number of differing kinds and degrees of consciousness. Among these kinds and degrees we can enumerate, perhaps rather arbitrarily:

- the individual/psychological consciousness of the director him-

self, or self-consciousness. This is especially evident, and even dominant, in the earlier films. Attenuated and qualified, it persists into the later work;

- a specifically cinematic consciousness, derived from Godard's thorough critical background and cinematic culture, and exemplified in the famous quote from the period of *Breathless* and *The Little Soldier* to the effect that when he began making features he knew a great deal about the cinema but nothing at all about life;
- the consciousness(es) of the spectator(s). This concern is perhaps the best expressed in the recent dictum that a film is not what happens on the screen, but what happens between the audience and the screen.

- a consciousness of fashion in several spheres, to which are closely allied a consciousness of journalism and journalistic modes. This has always been a particularly open and given aspect of his work, and could perhaps usefully be compared with the more covert employment of similar modes in a classical film-maker like Hitchcock. There would be no *a priori* reason to reprove it unless one were adopting an uncritically Leavisite/Holbrookian position;
- consciousnesses of colour and of form, employed both as adjuncts to the deployment of a series of ideas, and as weapons in their own right. This area could perhaps be resumed under the simple heading of an acute aesthetic consciousness.

(Related to this area, but perhaps not directly relevant to it is the marked technical expertise in terms of editing, music, camera movement or avoidance of it, soundtrack, etc).

In short, this confluence of consciousnesses (often in some sense flawed, often describable as 'self-conscious' whether one sees self-consciousness in a mechanical reproduction art-form like the cinema as desirable or not) implies only one thing: an intellectual cinema. To be able to defend Godard, you have to believe specifically in the possibility of a cinema of ideas. Not of people, not of stories, not of characters, not of emotion, not of *le vécu*, not of myth. But of ideas. At the same time it goes without saying that most of the above elements have roles to play and functions to fulfil – stories are told, 'real people' are met, emotions are experienced, etc, in Godard movies – but these roles and functions are subordinate to the main project, which ever since *The Little Soldier* has been specifically to provoke reflection. In the most recent films – the ones made since 1968 – this project has been sustained, and in fact substantially changed, by a profound but allied interest in relations of production.

At this point – the question of the possibility of a cinema of ideas – a certain critical confusion is liable to obtrude itself, largely because of the 'specifically cinematic' consciousness mentioned above. In his earlier films Godard took his visual style(s) from almost everywhere, or, to put it more discreetly, there was a multiplicity of visual influences at work. We might single out Hollywood

in general, Minnelli/Rossellini/Renoir/Bresson/Dreyer in particular, and countless painters, designers and advertising artists whose influences are detectable in individual shots and sequences. He also seemed to borrow the instinctual (or so firmly culturally established that it may seem to be instinctual) humanism of the American cinema. The very people to whom the notion of a cinema of ideas is repulsive are usually among the staunchest lovers of those other cinemas just mentioned as source-influences for Godard's material: Hollywood, Rossellini, and so on. Godard loved – loves – those cinemas too, but while loving them he is not of them. He uses them, in at least a double fashion – to heighten consciousness of the artefact itself, to transmit whatever the thematic point of the moment is. And a third possible use is simply an aesthetic pleasure in the movement of the image/idea itself.

Any approach to cinema that is founded in a practice of sharpening consciousness, has to include a political dimension, be it explicit or only alluded to. The 'social cinema' normally adopts a practice of implying things only; they have to be perceived through armatures – of narrative, dramatic form, ideology, characterisation – that are often frankly reactionary. Godard's practice in this area is quite the opposite: explicit, along with a whole number of other more or less explicit concerns, from *The Little Soldier* onwards.<sup>2</sup> The best way to illustrate this might be to look in some detail at *Vivre sa vie*, his fourth feature made in 1962.

## 3

*Vivre sa vie* was the last movie Godard made to find general critical acceptance as an 'art' movie before the real trouble began over *Les carabiniers*. It contains (at least) the following elements, treated (expressed) explicitly:

- the relationships between men and women;
- the oppression of women;
- language and its use in society, silence and its use in society;
- questioning: the habit of asking questions, the practice of using the asking of questions as a form of relationship between people;
- acceptance: what is seen as the joy of simply accepting existence as it happens – 'tout est beau' – expressed in Nana's dance, which is also a deliberate form of offering, and which is related to her question to the philosopher, 'Why can't we just be silent?' (cf above, language and silence); which is also related to certain ideas of emotion, of warmth, and contact;
- appearance and reality;
- death as finality: something almost to be courted, at any rate looked forward to in a spirit of acceptance;
- responsibility, expressed in this film tautologically in Nana's

- 10 speech (scene 6): '*je lève la main – je suis responsable*' etc;
- prostitution;
  - communication;
  - documentation/documentary;
  - the pursuit of consciousness, present in alternating forms throughout the film, but expressed specifically in the scene with the philosopher Brice Parain, in which the principal ideas are that there is a certain difference between thinking/talking on the one hand and life (*le vécu*) on the other, and that to think properly you have to be at a certain distance from life – but this leads to obvious difficulties, so there has to be a balance;
  - and, in the same scene, the practice of arriving at the truth through a process (or processes) of errors and lies;
  - work – as oppression (the scene of Nana in the record shop) – and as the only thing worth doing (Parain) because it is the only process that leads you to the *mot juste*;
  - struggle: in her talk with Parain Nana makes another plea for a life that would be silent, happy, accepting and probably without conflict, but the idea of struggle informs the whole film and is present emblematically in the scene where she is being questioned by the police after having been arrested for shoplifting and her full name is revealed as Nana Kleinekampf ('little struggle');
  - the relationship between life and art (the Oval portrait scene) – covered by Susan Sontag in her essay on the film.<sup>3</sup> (It goes without saying that the preoccupations listed above frequently overlap with one another, and recur in other movies.)

At the same time, the movie has a constant preoccupation with form, as in its opening, where we see Karina's face from three sides, with form expressed in terms of breaks and fragmentations, replicated in the episodic structure by scenes and the abrupt hesitations of music and speech on the soundtrack.

There have been widely different critical reactions to this kind of multiplicity of elements and motifs. For instance: to accept them uncritically (because they are fashionable?) – to deplore them *en bloc* – to say, yes, very interesting; but he should have taken one of them stuck to it; and explored it in depth the 'rationalist' approach). In my view a more useful position might be to accept the multiplicity of points of view and try to study how they contradict, confirm or reflect off each other. In this film as in all of Godard's the points of view are held together in a continuous discourse which oscillates between coherence and incoherence. But it's the primacy accorded the notion of discourse which distinguishes the mode from all others.

*Vivre sa vie* is an early film which prefigures the developments of the later ones. An extract that might be useful to teachers in this context, as it exemplifies the multi-directional aspirations of the movie, is Extract Number 2 (scenes 7 & 8).<sup>4</sup> It begins with Nana, a shopgirl who would like to be an actress, writing a letter

of application to a madam for a place in her brothel. The camera begins by holding on the full text of the letter itself, as the girl writes it (writing as work seen literariness, the context of employment). The text is interrupted only for a joke: in mid-shot we see Nana rise to her feet and estimate her own height, almost in terms of hands, like measuring a horse, in order to give accurate details to her employer. Raoul, her future pimp, arrives, and for the rest of the scene dominates her with his offer of better-paid work. Set up behind him as they sit facing one another, the camera tracks from side to side while they talk, sometimes letting us see her at an angle, then blocking her out completely behind his head and back. We don't see much of his face, and what we do see is vulpine; but at the same time there is a kind of sincere charm to his flattery of her, to his assurances, to his almost naive insistence that he wishes her well. The emotion of contact, shared on both sides. After they have gone out together, there is a beautiful long-shot of the Champs-Elysees that served as backdrop to the previous scene, and a narrating voice entones an elegiac phrase: '*C'est à l'heure où s'allument les lumières de la ville que commence la ronde sans espoir des filles de la rue*'. After this Nana is being shown her future beats, almost certainly by Raoul, but the sequence is immediately changed into a montage about prostitution in general, in which the severely Bressonian quality of the shots is counterpointed by an aggressively informative narrated soundtrack, with full documentation: statistics on health, police surveillance, what happens when prostitutes get pregnant or drunk, prices, and the fact that when on duty they have the right to refuse no paying customer. This mutates into a further montage of Nana in hotel rooms, and with her first customer. As he prepares to pay her, there is a remarkably expressive (expressionist?) big close-up of his hand, his trouser pocket and his fly in close conjunction.

The final point to be made about *Vivre sa Vie* is that it stands right outside its heroine. Her own consciousness flickers on and off, Godard's never ceases, nor does the discourse.

#### 4

Probably the richest period of Godard's work, and certainly the easiest to do a kind of classical *auteur* study on, would be the eight films made between 1964 and 1968 – beginning with *Une femme mariée* and going through to *Weekend*. For the purpose of this essay we'll treat these films in the most condensed fashion possible, partly because they're very well-known and much-written-about movies, but also because there is a sense, in which Godard has never been the author of his own work. The work has been plucked out of the atmosphere, out of what was going on, out of the different modes of consciousness set out above. An enormous number of different things are happening in these films: if we

- 12 try to single out the explicitly political elements, we see that they are stated sharply, clearly but in rather a self-contained way in *Pierrot le fou*, and in *Masculine, feminine* they spread out to permeate the whole film. Léaud equates modern life with military service: '24 hours a day authority – a life of taking orders'. In the launderette sequence Robert tells him: '... you'll never find an individual solution. There isn't any. You've got to throw yourself into the struggle, and by being in it you end up learning. You put up with too much. That's impossible. . . It's a kind of movement, you know; perpetual rebellion. I can't put up with all you put up with. That's why I'm active in the union'. Léaud finds work for a public opinion poll and then that 'the questions he had to ask deformed public opinions'; that all questions are informed by ideology.

The political emphasis explodes in extraordinary form in *Made in USA*, where Godard denounces explicitly his own devotion to American cinema but at the same time pays tribute to it in a film which is a kind of orgy of shape, colour, form, music and sound: abstract and concrete together, with a very highly developed sense of playing. Emblems abound, and are shuffled past and round each other: the bloody death's head in the doctor's surgery, the paint shop where movie posters are knocked up. Playfulness: the main body of the film ends with a series of confessions by the principal murderers. David Goodis kills Widmark, Paula Nelson then kills Goodis. 'Oh Paula, you have robbed me of my youth'. And yet this riot leads out into the simplest of interview-type sequences, in which Paula ends by flatly rejecting the bourgeois journalist Philippe Labro's contention that in the modern world there's no difference between right and left.

*Two or Three Things I Know about Her* presents a highly-coloured development of the documentary motif, and counterpointing this, the climax of the motif of individual-director consciousness. At this time Godard was expressing a great interest in television, and a desire to work in it, and his sense of the medium's possibilities is very well illustrated in the *Nouvel Observateur* interview reprinted in *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1966-7. At the same time there is the obsessive, doubting (in the best sense) commentary read by the director himself: 'me, writer and painter'.<sup>5</sup>

*La Chinoise* (in the words of its script) marks the 'first timid steps' towards a Marxist-Leninist ideology and towards the elaboration of a science of images that might be both scientific and revolutionary. In memory, two other things stand out in the film: its strong formal sense, with controlled but blazing colour, and the distinctly voluntarist character of the protagonists' conscious engagement with political issues.<sup>6</sup> Playfulness again: the people reach out to try and grasp ideas, to try and grasp at practice. Wiazemsky and Léaud are used much as Karina and Belmondo or

Léaud had been used in earlier films: as sacred individuals, not as actors with a task of demonstrating certain things.

13

This brings us to *Weekend*, the culmination of the '64-'68 period and also the watershed film, the key to the past and future, containing both on almost equal terms. The film is built around the question of culture, which is what allowed Robin Wood to claim Godard as a belated, tragically-despairing adherent to Leavis and the Great Tradition (*New Left Review* 39). It remains, however, that what is being discussed here is the necessary destruction of a culture, and not last-minute attempts to salvage it. To select five symbolic moments from the movie (the first of which would seem to give Wood some ground for his position, the remaining four radically contradicting it):

- a distinguished concert pianist takes a grand piano in a pantech-nicon to a country farmyard, where he plays Mozart to a small, bored and passive audience (musical action in defence of a culture), while the camera moves twice through 360 degrees passing the blank or neutral faces of the listeners. At the end of the performance the pianist puts himself down, he wasn't worthy to play this music - 'you should have heard Schnabell';
- Jean Yanne, down-and-out by the roadside, begs a lift from a well-fed, chauffeur-driven elderly lady. 'Would you rather', she asks him before replying, 'be fucked by Johnson or Mao?' Yanne sizes her up and opts for Johnson. 'Dirty fascist' says the lady, and drives on;
- a sizeable chunk of the film is given over to three garbage-collectors, African and Arab, who are described as the Refuse-men of the Third World, and who deliver a great deal of Third World situation-speech straight into camera. Faces and words;
- near the end of the film, there is a massacre; horrible, says one character; not as horrible as the bourgeoisie, says another;
- a printed caption indicates that Godard is striving for the 'Language of October'.

In *Weekend* the class struggle is seen as a violent, anarchistic, apocalyptic clash rather than as a struggle between socialised forces. The confusion is embodied in the style of the film, with brightly-coloured references in all directions, and the formulation, at one point, that 'this is the end of the grammatical era, and the beginning of the flamboyant, especially in the cinema'. If a single emotion, a single formulation, crosses to the spectator, it is the violent rejection of a certain form of society and a great uncertainty about what to put in its place. There is even the familiar suggestion, rendered concretely in the film in terms of similarities and parallels in their rituals - eggs and fish between girls' thighs - that the revolutionary society will be another formulation of the murderously bourgeois one we knew already. *Weekend* kicks the discipline of *La chinoise* out of the window; but both films have to be seen as the complementary summation of a certain

14 period. Both were being made in the year before May.

(This highly selective account has omitted at least three other important elements which peaked in the same period;

– the strain of individual romanticism, seen in *Pierrot* and in *Alphaville* – 'I am as alive as my love and my despair'; the tendency to reduce human life to animal simplicity and absurdity, felt in *Two or Three Things* and in the sequence in *Weekend* where we see a worm crawling through the mud and the reflection on the soundtrack that 'we don't know ourselves at all';

– the militant feminism of *Une Femme mariée*.)

The images of this extraordinary period were confused, and had to be confused; it was the May revolution and its aftermath that gave Godard the cue for an attempt at ordering them.

## 5

In a short interview in the first number of *Cinéthique* (January 1969) we find Godard proposing that films should be made simply, quickly and cheaply, perhaps out of a system of assemblies, commissions and delegations. Revolutionary cinema should be a matter of simplicity: it could be practised by reading the magazine *Practical Cinema* and reflecting on its content with Marxist theory. At the same time he advances the idea that each shot (in a revolutionary movie) should be a criticism of the one before. Film magazines and reviews are nothing better than the truth once a month and should be replaced by roneotyped information sheets.

During and after the period of the revolution Godard had been very active making the Cinetracts – a series of very short silent films, composed almost entirely of stills representing moments of May/June or emblematic of ideas related to them, with hand-written messages – slogans and aphorisms – inscribed across them from shot through shot. He was also making *Un film comme les autres* (never shown in Britain) and *One plus one*.<sup>7</sup> All this work found its momentary synthesis in *Le gai savoir*, made for French television late in 1968, and of course never shown there. All the elements described in the preceding sections of this essay are present in the film, but redefined, or at any rate put in a new perspective, by the notion that revolution, or at least revolutionary work, both political and cinematic, are on the order of the day. The film is built around a couple (Léaud and Juliette Berto) whose main project is the search for a revolutionary cinema, and who are also, at moments, a loving couple too. 'Love is a discourse in which each makes the other tell him what he is. Perhaps, in looking for the zero degree of images and sounds, in listening to its echo in my memory, I am living with you the zero degree of love'. The permanent fragility of the discourse is re-emphasised in a long dialogue shortly before the end of the film:

Léaud: When we were, when we were together, the sweet game

of being two was being played for us. Sometimes it happened to me, on the shoulder to sleep, and you had beaten me in the race, plunged into the night before me, and fear seized me at that sudden silence. Anguish at finding myself alone like a trial death. Not that I was afraid of dying, me, I've always been resigned to that, but that space stretched out in front of me in all directions like a lost path.

Berto: With the fear of finding myself before a mirror without image, of feeling myself the shadow of an absent being, detached from myself, committed to a world of dreams where I have no place, where I couldn't follow him, and even if tomorrow I learn that if I have followed it for him, I shan't be able to believe a word of it, and in any case I shall only have followed in his footsteps for a short time.

Léaud: In this way I spent half our life.

Berto: In the street, the metro, in that despair which . . . finally could only be compared with a prison, with a life of punishment, a sort of madness, in which I could end by forgetting even those I had lost. I have never in my life woken without sobbing — a deep, soundless sob —

Léaud: — at all the injustice of the night. Sometimes its feeling grew so strong in me that it lasted, open-eyed, for a long time, and you asked 'What's the matter? And I couldn't say, believing that it was the mist of bad dreams still clouding my eyes, still struggling in the tangled memories of darkness —

Berto: Or else aware that telling about it would explain nothing.

Léaud: I deliberately turned the conversation over to things that had happened the day before, or what to do in the days to come, and thus I kept to myself, this almost present, this tearing of the depths, like a pain that you hide. In my youth I used sometimes to tell my dreams.

Berto: But I haven't for a long time now. . . . That obscure part of existence, sometimes, more and more won over from waking life, from my very silence. It threw me into terrible doubts about everything.

Léaud: And firstly about us, about what made us be and say 'us'.

Berto: An 'us' meaning you and me, an 'us' different from this false plural which exists only by my presence, and remains when these elements diminish, grow, vary, the kind of 'us' which is barely more than an extension of 'me'.

Léaud: That reality that you could like me destroy, better than me. I say all this without examples, just like that. In abstract form, because this long discourse that I am,

however much I turn towards you.

Berto: My love,

Léaud: I know well that it's the artifice of a drowned man. I say you, I share things between you and me, as if nothing had happened, and though I sometimes have doubts that's the way I remember –

Berto: – that I still have my reason.

But this moment should not be privileged over the rest of the film, which consist of a large number of stylistic exercises aimed at starting from zero, at stripping cinema down to its simplest elements before re-constructing it along ideologically conscious lines.

Principal ideas here: to learn, to teach, to turn against the enemy the very weapon the enemy uses – language. Just as the social sciences dissolve man, so the film-maker can dissolve the elements of film – image, sound, movement, emotion – to find out what makes them work. This Léaud and Berto propose to do by collecting images and sounds on a random basis – not an unscientific procedure, says one of them, because the unconscious is structured. In this way there may be a chance for future film-production to be done on the basis of what's known rather than what isn't. They will collect facts, things, phenomena, discover the truth of internal bonds, and hence the laws that govern them. This activity will be practical and theoretical at the same time. Then a narrator's voice (Godard's?) talks about the international situation and the re-entry of revolution into the sphere of conflicting forces. Throughout the sequence Léaud and Berto are silent but listening. It culminates with a still of a demonstrating crowd, with the written caption: *Ce n'est qu'un début*, while the voice asks the question: 'By what game of tension and opposition must the phrase: There is nothing in the whole world which develops in an absolutely equal manner, be translated? The phrase, in its turn, goes deeper, stretches out, and multiplies. It points to the moment in which we are working here . . .'.

Various tactics are suggested for meeting the demands of this moment. If you want to see the world, close your eyes. (*Si tu veux voir le monde, ferme tes yeux, Rosemonde*). There are no self-evident truths; self-evident truths belong to bourgeois philosophy. We must be careful not to fall into the ideology of 'real life'. Banks exist to lend banknotes; dictionaries exist to lend words. The eye must listen before it looks. We must be interested not in representation but in presentation. There is a system of education along simple class lines (illustrated with an excellent quotation from a French government minister). Thought is dialectical: Juliette thinks, and she is thought. Towards the end, the film breaks into a series of potential other films: an amateur film, a school film, an imperialist film, a didactic film, a guerrilla film. Then the screen goes black, while various voices, alternately clear .

and muffled, make political statements, speeches, comments. Finally, Léaud comes up with a compound neologism — MI SO TO DI MAN — a mixture of method with feeling — as a way to define images and sounds i.e., the cinema. The film is a difficult one, and the above account simplifies its elements considerably. Nonetheless, it was a kind of launching pad for the various experiments Godard was to try out in the next two years.

## 6

Of these experiments we are in a position to explore three. *British Sounds* develops the practice first suggested in *Gai savoir* of separating out image and sound. The film is constructed in six simple episodes, each describing or accounting for different moments in political life in Britain. Visually, the style is extremely simple: elegant documentary reportage. The soundtrack is highly sophisticated, and illustrative of an evergrowing concern for text. The idea that there is a science of the image, and that it's important to build it, is reiterated. The break with the Hollywood system introduces a radical change in aesthetics. The aesthetic developing here would seem to be one of pictures being criticised by words. Pictures, images, can be very seductive; the more beautiful they are, and the more lifelike, the more potentially deluding and impregnated with the ideology of the status quo. The cinema, then, is confronted by a total dilemma: it would seem to represent 'things, facts, phenomena' but in fact it is not representing them but giving an image of them, and this image is of necessity not an innocent one. It is the role of the text to make this lack of innocence clear; to qualify or criticise with 'correct' words the sense impressions produced by the image. The text of *British Sounds* spells these aims out explicitly: the system of representation is part of bourgeois ideology, the cinema should 'not record realities, but simply areas of contradictions'. It is 'not a reflection of reality, but the reality of that reflection'. This reality of reflection can be seen clearly as a development of the problematic of consciousness in earlier Godard, and as bearing a clear relationship with the ideas of Brecht about the theatre.

Two films made in 1969, *Pravda* and *Struggles in Italy*, take the above proposals a stage further. Each is built around the problems between film and ideology. Each develops the practice, inaugurated in *Gai savoir*, of leaving the screen blank for short or longer moments, to several ends: (a) to replace an image called censored or appropriated by the bourgeoisie or international capitalism; (b) to interrupt the flow of images and sense-impressions in an attempt to force the spectator to listen to the text; (c) to play a positive role in reorganising the images so that they embody the growth of revolutionary knowledge and the struggle for that growth. This is the process that Godard refers to in several interviews and short articles as making film politically (as

- 18 opposed to making political films) and as 'the struggle for the editing'. *Struggles in Italy* is about an Italian girl. It begins with a sequence of very simply ordered shots describing her life in various spheres: in education (she is a student, and also a teacher – in her own time she gives history lessons to a young worker), in society (she is a consumer – she buys a blouse in a boutique), in relation to her family, in relation to a man, and her ideas about personal identity. The voice of the girl herself commentating: 'Earlier I said that I was a marxist and that I was a member of the revolutionary movement. But in reality (...) I said (...) something else. I said: there is idealism and there is marxism. And I did not say that marxism struggles against idealism. And this is the important thing, because when you say marxism you say struggle. (...) I said I was a marxist, but in reality I remained an idealist, because I did not oppose idealism, I did not struggle against it'. The struggle then begins, and it is projected into the visual fabric of the film itself by means of repeated re-iterations of the shots that went to make up the opening sequence, ceaselessly reorganised to fit a rigorously questioning commentary, punctuated by black spaces. 'The relationship between images and black spaces had been organised from this point, this centre called society. This relationship has a name: ideology. *Ideology: relationship, necessarily imaginary, of yourself to your real conditions of existence*'. In this second part of the film, the black spaces are a battlefield of ideas. 'Return to practice. Criticism of past practice. Transformation. (...) Begin to transform yourself. Produce knowledge'. Each area of the girl's life is gone over and criticised, its contradictions laid bare. And in particular the contradiction that for all her militant practice and for all her militant talk, she remains in practice and in ideas largely governed by bourgeois ideology (referred to as 'the determinant region'). Whence a renewal of the struggle: 'To discover with Marx that life is a contradiction present in things and phenomena themselves which is continually posed and continually resolved. To discover with Marx that as soon as contradiction ceases, life ceases as well, and death comes. To discover that contradiction is universal and at the same time specific'. And this second section of the film ends with a formulation that bears equally on the life of a militant and on the cinematic process itself. 'The problem does not lie in the reflection itself, but in the *struggle between a reflection that denies the objective contradictions and a reflection that expresses them*'.

The third part of the film proposes changes. The black spaces begin to be filled. The space relating to society is replaced 'by a scene of a workshop, that is, by a scene of a production relationship'. (In practice, this is not so much a 'scene' as an image, a symbolic representation of a production relationship, but in both *British Sounds* and *Pravda* there are genuine scenes of production

relationships.) The space relating to education is replaced by the voice of the university apparatus 'speaking of ideas – in themselves. It does not say where they come from' while (in vision) the girl herself passes on the same message to the young worker. 'The blow had hit the mark. I was ensuring in my own practice the daily uninterrupted reproduction of capitalist production relationships'. The film ends on a note that would obviously repel the bourgeois critic if he were so unlucky as to stumble into a showing of it. How is the girl to change her life, to become transformed? 'Aggravate the contradiction. To bring into my life the struggle – the class struggle – the class struggle into my life. Programme: to think of subjectivity in terms of class'. And then on the kind of severely practical admission that doesn't – in conventional aesthetic terms – find much favour either, but which has come to characterise the endings of most of Godard's more recent work: 'But it is a difficult road. And what I have said is at most an indication of work and struggle'.

*Pravda* attempts to operate on two levels at once: to give an account of the Czechoslovak situation; and to initiate (as in *Struggles in Italy*) a programme of re-education of the intellectuals; the word 'intellectuals' we take here to mean anyone capable of responding to political ideas anywhere. The programme of re-education adheres verbally fairly closely to extracts from the Quotations of Chairman Mao, and to other material taken more or less directly from Peking Information and from classic Leninist texts. Two disembodied voices (named as Vladimir and Rosa, and who are perhaps the descendants of Léaud and Berto in *Gai savoir*) interrogate and inform one another ceaselessly on the questions of Czechoslovakia, modern revisionism, and re-education. What is particularly interesting about the film is that these elements are combined with a renewed symbolic vigour (in intermittent but strategically located shots) which is all the more striking for being juxtaposed with a very dense and militantly polemical text. For instance: Marxist-Leninist thought represented by a blossoming rose; the same rose trampled in the mud for the invasion of Czechoslovakia; red wine spilling from a lager glass (the brand name of the lager is 'International') to denote revisionist butchery (much as petty-bourgeois butchery was indicated by the flowing of rabbit and human blood in *Weekend*); a beautiful high-angled shot of a circular tramway terminal, to indicate at first appearance the enclosed situation in which the Czech working-class finds itself, and later the necessary circularity of all intellectual work; a girl stands holding the rose on a stalk (impression of fragility) while a peasant hay-wain crosses the back of the frame. These sophisticated images are complemented by the now familiar rough-and-ready ones (including many of production scenes), the black spaces for reflection and 'editing' – thinking about the shot which came before and the one which is to

- 20 come after – the same emphasis on work and struggle, the same urgent desire to ‘establish new connections between images and sounds’. There is also a visual insistence on the colour red, a textual one on the idea that ‘red’ can mean very different things. In the last stages of the film, we have frequent shots of the cameraman himself, filming with the Little Red Book attached to the camera, while the voices of Vladimir and Rosa are already admitting (another usual motif) that the film is a failure. ‘You’ve been wrong – too dogmatic. Images still have force. You’ve adopted the style of posters and slogans. You thought you were taking one step forward, in fact you were taking two steps back’. But mistakes have to be made in public, otherwise no work can get done at all. Who cares about failure? Thinking is difficult. Ideas come from social practices. . . .

## 7

One problem that has to be confronted immediately is the fact, as Gérard Leblanc put it in his article on *Pravda* in *Cinéthique*, that ‘the Dziga Vertov group’s films don’t reach the masses, and the few militants who see them reject them for their intellectualism’. In other words, the Dziga Vertov group is not making agitational films in the accepted sense; there’s no question of the films provoking (or even reflecting) revolutionary-type events in the ‘real world’; the politicisation of film undertaken here is strictly internal to the film itself. The group itself stresses that the films are not intended for large audiences, but for small groups conscious of ideological questions. The films themselves make one acutely aware that even within these small groups there must be further subdivisions, even smaller groups, split up along the lines of political culture and cinema culture, and then again according to the various forms of cross-mating possible between these two cultures. *Cinéthique* defines itself as ‘a movement of cinephiles moving towards politics’. Godard’s status is essentially the same.

But the questions raised by this ‘movement’ can be of great importance both to mass cinema and to cinema criticism. They tie up, more than three decades later, with some of the propositions advanced by Walter Benjamin in his essays on ‘The author as producer’ and ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’. In the first essay Benjamin called for the rejection of the old question, How does a work stand in relation to the relationships of production of a given period, and proposed substituting the question, How does the work stand *in* the relationships of production? He then surveyed various apparently ‘political’ art movements of the 20’s and 30’s – ‘activism’ and ‘the new objectivity’ – and concluded from their failure that the process of politicisation should intervene at the stage of production of an art-work and not merely as part of the preliminary ideological formation of its producer(s). The latter process can lead

only to works' of a political tendency', not to political works. 'However revolutionary this political tendency may appear, it actually functions in a counter-revolutionary manner as long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat ideologically and not as a producer'. The 'new objectivity' for instance, had the effect of making documentary fashionable; but documentary presented poverty as something 'beautiful', to be contemplated, without promoting political consciousness of poverty. 'Misery became a commercial asset'.

For Benjamin, photography was meaningless unless it had captions. It was the caption that in picture papers (and by extension, the cinema) could tear photography away from 'fashionable clichés and give it a revolutionary use-value'.

*The author as producer* ends with a single demand to the writer: that he should reflect, think about his position in the process of production. Godard's maxim – that it is more important to make films politically than to make political films – is an echo of these propositions.

The proposition about photography and captions is more fully developed in 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', which polemically goes much further in establishing the revolutionary credentials of cinema than anything in Eisenstein. Benjamin saw mechanical reproduction in all its forms – newspapers, photography, cinema – as being the instrument that opened a breach in the wall of the traditional values of the cultural heritage. These he defined as Uniqueness and Permanence, the qualities of which tie traditional, artisanal, individualistic art to essentially religious and ritualistic modes. The moving-picture image, with its characteristics of transitoriness and reproducibility has the effect of destroying the aura of permanence around the object, of 'prying it from its shell'. With the film, art leaves 'the realm of the beautiful semblance' and moves into a consciously mobilising stance. The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon became even more explicit and more imperative in the film, where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding ones'. Godard carries this thought of Benjamin's a stage further with the proposition (in and around *British Sounds*) that photography, in its 'natural' state, was an ideological invention of the bourgeoisie and must be dissolved and reconstituted along critical lines before it can serve as a weapon for socialist purposes.

The theoretical consequences of this position have been admirably worked through by J. P. Fargier in his *Cinéthique* article *Parenthesis or Indirect Route*.<sup>8</sup> Bourgeois cinema is not only a vector for ideologies already in circulation; it also secretes its own specific ideology: the impression of reality. The impression of reality spawns two processes in the spectator: recognition, and then mystification. The task of political cinema, and of cinema

- 22 criticism, is to destroy those processes. 'Life is not on the screen, and the most revolutionary film can only give what it has: images and sounds'. It should by now be clear that these lines of development must have their application to the whole of cinema, and not simply to one sector arbitrarily labelled off as 'political'. All films can be analysed on the basis of their production, of the choices that go into the making of sounds and images during the process of production of a film. 'The only way to rehabilitate art is to say that aesthetic practice is the principal practice in the process of production of a film'.

#### Notes

1. All cinema is political, but the particular form of this exploration prevents us from looking in much detail either at political themes and motifs within the traditional 'commercial' cinema or in the 'social'/'socially-conscious' (social-fascist?) cinemas, Lumet, Ritt, *et al.* Or at the Franju-Resnais-Marker filiation, or at the various cinemas of the Third World which played an important role in the cultural fermentation of the late sixties. All of these areas, and not least the first, need urgent re-examination. The most we can do here is refer to some of their aspects at the points where they intersect with Godard and with the critical pursuits contemporaneous with his later work.
2. Since *The Little Soldier* is a key movie, marking Godard's first plunge into both politics and reflexiveness, it is only fair to say that despite the prominence in it of Mao's pamphlet *A single spark can start a prairie fire* and an acute awareness of the realities of the Algerian war, the general tone of the movie is, in simple political terms, predominantly reactionary. This arises quite naturally from the first category of consciousness stated at the beginning of this section: at the time he made *The Little Soldier* and in the period leading up to it Godard was nothing much more (in terms of his general ideas) than a petty-bourgeois right-wing anarchist with a good smattering of general culture. What redeems the film is its consciousness of dialectic and of process.
3. *Against interpretation*, London, 1967 (pp 196-207).
4. Hunter Films.
5. If ultimately the film doesn't work very well, it's because Marina Vlady doesn't really figure as any kind of a Brechtian actress, and also because in the last third of the movie there is an insufferably long word-game scene in a café.
6. Even at his most explicitly political, Godard is rejected by large sections of the left; it was probably the voluntarism of *La chinoise* that led *Cinéthique* to refer to it as 'smeared all over with politics, but but entirely invested with bourgeois ideology'.
7. Of which Thomas Elsaesser has given an excellent account in the *Brighton Film Review* No 21.
8. Reprinted in *Screen*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp 131-144.

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Only we are the face of our Times. The horn of time is sounded by us in literary art. The past is cramped. The Academy and Pushkin are less comprehensible than hieroglyphs. Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc, etc, from the steamer of modernity.

One of the features of early Futurism was the use of 'trans-sense' language — a semi-comprehensible collation of nonsense-words and neologisms — a play on words, their roots and suffixes. The Revolution forced all artists to reappraise their aesthetic aims. The early Futurists, and Mayakovsky in particular, had foreseen that new demands would need to be met, and for the first time Futurism underwent a profound change. The Futurists were the only art group to cooperate wholeheartedly with the new regime, though for the Party this was regarded very much as a matter of convenience until the chaotic period of the Civil War ended, and more attention could be given to Party policy in the arts.

On March 15, 1918, the Futurists issued the *Futurists' Paper No. 1* from the 'Poets' Cafe'. It continued the attacks on old art, and demanded the separation of art from the state, the abolition of titles, ranks, diplomas, etc, artists' control of all art schools, galleries, theatres, etc, universal art education, and the requisitioning and fair redistribution of all 'aesthetic stockpiles'. David Burlyuk Vasili Kamensky and Mayakovsky announced 'The 3rd Revolution — the Revolution of the Spirit'. Futurist aims were still idealistic, lyrical, and partially utopian. Burliuk called for equitable distribution of art studios among all the various arts tendencies to promote free competition between them.

The tone changed significantly in the paper *Art of the Commune* (19 issues, December 1918 to April 1919), the first of the three

26 successive post-Revolutionary Futurist journals. The editor was Osip Brik. This paper was officially the organ of the Section of Fine Arts (IZO) of the Narkompros, and was therefore published by the authority of A. V. Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Commissar for Education. As no other body of artists was yet willing to cooperate with the Party (the 'proletarian writers' were not yet sufficiently organised) the Futurists managed to secure control of leading positions within IZO (along with other 'left' artists), and for a short time Futurism became the *de facto* Party-supported art tendency. The 'old knights' of Futurism, as Chuzhak called them – the poets Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, Kamensky, were replaced in the vanguard of Futurism by new men, principally the art theorists Osip Brik, Nikolai Punin, Boris Kushner. Artists Kasimir Malevich and Ivan Puni, the leading Formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovsky, and the artist head of the Petrograd IZO Natan Altman also made valuable contributions to the paper. Mayakovskiy remained as leader of the new-found movement, but his very first Futurist friend, the artist David Burlyuk, had emigrated in 1918, and the other two Burlyuk brothers, also artists, had been killed in the War. The 'Ego-Futurists' – Igor Severyanin, Vadim Shershenevich and others – after a brief period of cooperation with the main group of 'Cubo-Futurists', split away from them through aesthetic differences of opinion.

For a few hectic months the new Futurists trumpeted their claims on Soviet art. 'Old art' continued to be attacked. The man-made object became a cult – the physical presence of material things, whether made by artists or factory workers, was held to more valuable than any 'idea' behind them. 'Embellishment' was to be replaced by participation in production processes, imitation of natural objects by creation of man-made objects. Art was to be 'organised', instead of the destructive 'bomb-throwing' of early Futurism, as Punin put it. The Futurists claimed to represent the proletariat (they thought it axiomatic that Futurism should be the art counterpart of the social revolution), and called on the political controllers of the Narkompros, for example, to exclude from the Literary Arts Section all writers not of a 'left art' tendency, ie they demanded official adoption. Brik explained that proletarian art was not 'art for the proletariat', or 'art of the proletariat', but 'art created by an artist with talent and a proletarian consciousness'. Kushner led the Com-Fut organisation, founded in January 1919, which attempted to fuse Communism and Futurism into a single way of life. At this stage the Futurists still emphasised the importance of the artist's skill, defended art that was 'not intelligible to the masses', and still talked of the 'creation' of art objects. The idea of 'collective creation' was formed, ie that the individual artists should be thought of as expressing the feeling of the collective through an intuitive consciousness of the collective will. This notion was the

There were certain conflicting views within *Art of the Commune*, for example Punin hopefully called for the distinction between 'left' and 'right' artists to be abolished, so that the artist's sole criterion should be his talent, while at the same time calls were being made for a 'left art' dictatorship in Soviet culture; and while claiming that Futurism was proletarian art Punin hinted that true art could always only be led by an avant-garde elite. Malevich's Suprematist theories of pure form and colour co-existed with Tatlin's preference for texture and relief in art objects.

The period of *Art of the Commune* was one of real influence and power in Soviet art for the Futurists, but one that found them rather uncertain and sometimes divided about the future trend of Futurism. The attacks on old art, on Symbolism and classical realist art, Shklovsky's and Brik's Formalist/Futurist ideas, the theoretical justification of the early Futurist experiments as necessary groundwork for the future and the defence of the 'difficulty' of Futurist art: all these were distasteful to the proletariat, to the old bourgeoisie, and to the party leaders, including Lenin, whose tastes in art were generally very conservative. But certain ideas in *Art of the Commune* pointed the way to a further adaptation of Futurism to suit the changing social conditions, Mayakovsky stated in the poem 'Poet worker':

'I also am a factory, And if I have no chimneys then perhaps it is harder for me. Who is higher – the poet or technician, who leads the people to material benefit? Both – their hearts are similar motors, their souls the same cunning engine. We are equal'.

Brik anticipated production art as early as December 1918:

'Go to the factories, this is the only task for artists. Creation of beauty is necessary not only for exhibitions and private mansions, but it must be brought into production . . . Artists must become producers. We must think less about beauty and create real things'.

Kushner said that 'art is simply work, expertise, a profession, a craft'.

Vs. Dmitriev took the most extreme view at the time, and declared:

'Art, painting as it was previously understood, is now giving way to *craft*. . . . Craft – the manufacture of furniture, utensils, signs, clothes – as basic creation in life, is becoming the foundation for new inspiration, is becoming the basis and meaning of art. . . . The artist is now simply a constructor and technician, a leader and foreman. . . . In this *craft* which we are going over to we need a refined knowledge of materials, stubborn experience, we must get used to stone, wood, metal, we must have a faultless, exact eye, and a muscular arm'. (March 1919).

Punin said that:

' in the " creation of life " and the production of new things art cannot be in any way useful . . . it contradicts the general, indubitable principle of *utility* in modern production, for aesthetics does not lead life but trails along in its wake . . . the construction of a thing is *totally* dependent on its *intended purpose*, artists can only add to it something superfluous from this point of view, for everything that is good in it is made without the artist's aid . . . the unity of the principle of construction, utility, will create beauty, and beauty will create us as artists. All modern things are therefore beautiful and good, because the combination of their parts, the necessity of each part, is dictated solely by usefulness, and the more basically this principle is applied, the better the thing will be '. (January 1919).

Significantly it was a practising artist who predicted most exactly the shape of things to come. Punin rather sadly concluded that the artist would be left with only petty applied art such as designing trade-marks. In the last issue of *Art of the Commune* Punin correctly predicted the trend to the eventual anti-art movement of production art, and the tendency to liquidate art altogether as a separate discipline.

Futurism had now passed from the early ' embellishment of life ' theory to advocacy of art in productional processes, and the notion of the artist as a constructor of materials had now been raised.

*Art of the Commune* was closed by the Narkompros after numerous attacks on the Futurists' strident demands for art dictatorship. Mayakovsky's poem ' It is too early to rejoice ' (No 2 December 1918) had, if taken literally, called for the physical destruction of old art (*And does Tsar Alexander still stand on Uprising Square? Dynamite it! . . . Why has Pushkin not been attacked, along with the other generals of the classics?*). With this poem, and a following one in the next issue, in mind, Lunacharsky wrote the article ' A Spoonful of Antidote ' in issue No 4 (December 1918), condemning the destructive bent towards past art of some of the Futurists, stressing that the Narkompros must be impartial to all art groups, and rejecting Futurist demands to be acknowledged as the official State Art school. Even Lunacharsky, liberal and tolerant though he was, could not condone the militant exclusiveness and dogmatism of the new Futurist platform.

A small booklet of Futurist-inspired articles called *Art in Production* (published by the Art-Productional Council of the Section of Fine Arts of the Narkompros, 1921) developed the theory of bringing art into production, but retained also the early Futurist ' transformationalist ' ideas of transforming life itself through art. The term ' production-art ' was now firmly established.

The first years of Lenin's New Economic Policy, from 1921, were

a bitter disappointment to the left artists. NEP was regarded as a betrayal of the social revolution, and attacks were also made on the 'NEPmen' in art — the traditional writers from the intelligentsia whom Trotsky called the 'fellow-travellers'.

In the atmosphere of considerable artistic freedom and relaxed social conditions Mayakovsky attempted to galvanise left artists into concerted action to maintain the momentum of the new art. Futurists had lost their domination of Russian art, and new groups were now contesting for influence (ironically summarised in the manifesto 'What is Lef fighting for?')

Mayakovsky described *Lef* in his autobiography 'I Myself' thus:

1923. We organise *Lef*. *Lef* is the envelopment of a great social theme by all the weapons of Futurism. This definition does not exhaust the matter of course — I refer those interested to *Lef* itself. Those who united closely together: Brik, Aseev, Kushner, Arvatov, Tretyakov, Rodchenko, Lavinsky. . . . One of the slogans, one of the great achievements of *Lef* — the de-aesthetisation of the productional arts, constructivism. A poetic supplement: agit-art and economic agitation: the advertisement.

Mayakovsky adds that he considered the latter type of work 'poetry of the highest quality'.

The editorial office of *Lef* was the 2nd floor Moscow flat of Osip and Lily Brik, to which people were constantly coming and going, and where lengthy discussions were frequently conducted. The piano was both played and used as a flat surface for drawing. Mayakovsky also often drew placards there on the bare floor.

*Lef* stands for 'Left Front of the Arts'. But who were the 'left' artists exactly? The 'we' of the *Lef* collective editorial board contained several new adherents. Arvatov was a theorist and critic, who, with Brik, supplied the theoretical reasoning behind the Constructivists. Aseev was a poet very close to Mayakovsky, who also made experiments in prose. Chuzhak and Tretyakov supplied the 'heavy' theoretical reasoning behind *Lef's* programme, and Chuzhak in particular stressed the importance of Marxist dialectics in the theory of contemporary art. He resigned from the editorial board after issue No. 3, dissatisfied with the persistence of the old Futurists' influence within the journal, and with the lack of emphasis on Marxist political thought by Futurist art and art theory. Tretyakov was also a poet and dramatist, and experimented with new forms such as the 'travel-film'. Aseev, Chuzhak and Tretyakov had come from the Far East, where Futurist propaganda had been carried on simultaneously with the campaign in Russia. Brik and Kushner survived from *Art of the Commune*. Kushner played a lesser role now but Brik was as always one of the most active organisers behind the scenes; his own literary output was limited, his contribution in *Lef* being experimental prose and the theory of Constructivism, but one of

30 his most important roles was to be a link between Futurism and the Russian Formalist school. The Formalists contributed to *Lef* from time to time, chiefly Viktor Shklovsky with valuable studies of Babel' and Pilnyak, and a theoretical article on the novel, and the linguist Formalist Grigorii Vinokur, giving several studies of Futurists and language. Yuri Tynyanov also published an important article on the development of Formalist theory: 'On the Literary Fact'. Issue No 5 of *Lef* was chiefly composed of Formalist articles on Lenin and language (shortly after Lenin's death) by Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Boris Eikhbaum, Lev Yakubinsky, V. Kazansky and Boris Tomashevsky.

The other major group participating in *Lef* were the Constructivists. Constructivism was started as a conscious movement in 1920, its origins being the 'art in production' theories of *Art of the Commune*, and the Cubo-Futurist style of painting from which emerged the three-dimensional abstract sculptures of Tatlin and Rodchenko. The latter designed all the covers of *Lef*, with bold square lettering in two colours, that of No 2 being one of the first experiments in photo-montage – one minor aspect of Constructivist activity. Rodchenko worked with Mayakovsky directly from 1923 on placards, agit-posters, and designs for Mayakovsky's books and stage productions. Lavinsky contributed practical designs, and Lyubov Popova. Varvara Stepanova (Rodchenko's wife), as well as Rodchenko himself published designs for textiles as one of the spheres of production in which the artist could usefully take part. Stepanova and Popova, and Tatlin too, actually went to work in textile factories to put production-art theory into practice. The three Vesnin brothers printed their Constructivist architectural designs. The terms 'production-art' and 'Constructivism' were now used interchangeably.

Some of the original Futurist poets contributed; Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, Kamensky (whose 'The Juggler' helped stir up opposition to *Lef* from hostile critics in other camps), and Mayakovsky himself printed the important poem 'About That' in issue No 1. Mayakovsky also drafted the manifestoes in No 1 (published collectively) and most of the other editorial material. The survival in *Lef* of the experimental poets was one of the factors causing constant disputes within the journal. The new 'production artists' considered that it was time for the 'trans-sense' period of Futurist verse to be quietly consigned to the archives.

Other notable occasional contributors were rather outside the scope of the 'left front': Pasternak, who had been connected with the Futurists from their very early days, Babel (extracts from *Red Cavalry* appeared before publication of the book) and the prose of Artem Veseluy. Finally there was an article each from film directors Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov on the theory of the 'montage of attractions' and 'eccentrism', and the 'cinema-eye', each of which has substantial connections with the theory of left art.

The 'Left Front of the Arts' was therefore a rather heterogeneous grouping of artists in many fields who felt that the new art spread over and blurred the old dividing lines of art. The term 'left artist' could only be defined roughly as an artist influenced by Futurist, Formalist or Constructivist theories on art, ie a general hostility to imitation of life, in favour of 'creation' or 'construction' of life; hostility to realism in art, or a tendency to utilitarianism; rejection of '*belles-lettres*' in literature, of 'pure' or 'easel-art' in painting, and of 'applied art' (in the sense of art 'applied' to a ready-made object). The term 'left' artist does not, of course, imply any specific political allegiance on the artists' part. The range of theories, too numerous to discuss in detail, went from the 'trans-sense' poetic experimentation of some of the Futurists, supported by a part of Formalist theory, all of which was impatiently dismissed by the most rapidly evolving section of Constructivists as 'laboratory work', to the 'production art' theory of these same Constructivists, that was already not only an anti-aesthetic tendency, but one leading rapidly to an anti-art programme. As Shklovsky later said: *Often, in destroying ornamentation, we also destroyed the construction.* This latter tendency had already dismissed the terms 'creation' and 'inspiration' (still used in *Art of the Commune*) for 'production' and 'technical expertise'. The 'creation of life' now became 'construction of life', and the efficiency of the machine was to be the ideal standard for human production (by artists). In short, the 'art in production' of 1921 had now become simply art *as* production. The making of an art 'thing' was to be of the same nature as the manufacture of a pair of shoes or a motor-car. Organisation or 'Taylorisation' of art meant that the only justification left for the existence of the artist would be his traditional feeling for the possibilities of his materials, organised into forms according to a utilitarian principle. This would be his only advantage over the factory specialist-engineer.

The literary Constructivists, headed by Zelinsky and Selvinsky, published a manifesto in the last issue of *Lef* in which they extended the theory to the realm of literature, adding to it the principle of 'loadification' of the literary language.

*LEF* ceased publication with the single issue of 1925. The number of copies of the journal printed declined from 5,000 to 1,500 for the last issue. In his autobiography for 1924 Mayakovsky claimed that in spite of falling printing figures the activity of *Lef* was still increasing. He claimed that the figures showed just the usual bureaucratic lack of interest in the separate journals of the large and cold-blooded mechanism of GIZ (State Publishing House). But the fact was that *Lef's* programme was just not popular with the public (the old accusation of 'unintelligibility to the masses' was still being flung at the Futurists) who still preferred the literature of the 'fellow-travellers'. After high initial hopes *Lef*, with all

32 its internal contradictions and under pressure from elsewhere, seemed to exhaust for the time being the evolution of left art, and publication was terminated by the State Publishing House.

Mayakovsky revived the journal in 1927 under the title *New Lef*, which was, he said, to be 'left of *Lef*'. 24 monthly issues were published until the end of 1928, but Mayakovsky, for rather mysterious reasons (probably a disillusionment with the relentless continuing anti-art trend of left art) resigned the editorship to Tretyakov in July 1928. *New Lef* took production art to its logical limit. A new emphasis on the 'fact' as the sole valid material for literature, and on the writer as the craftsman of language, just like a craftsman in any form of industrial activity, became almost the sole theme of this latest evolution of Futurism. Art genres now considered most worthy were those comprising 'factography', ie the newspaper report, the diary, the travel-sketch, the documentary film, etc. This *Literature of Fact* was collated in a book of that title (made of articles drawn mostly from *New Lef*) published in 1929 under the editorship of Chuzhak.

Futurism had therefore passed through a whole revolution in outlook, from the original 'art for art' view of the earliest experimental verse, through 'art in production', utilitarian or 'production' art and Constructivism, and on to mere reportage or 'literature of fact'. As an art movement Futurism had destroyed itself, partly in a voluntary attempt to change with the changing times, and partly through public and Party hostility or indifference. - In 1930 Mayakovsky committed suicide and in 1932 all writers were forced to join the single Union of Soviet Writers, and all previous groupings were abolished. The articles in *Lef* show us left art theory and practice somewhere rather past the middle stage of its evolution.

R.S.

**What is *Lef Fighting For?* (Manifesto),  
Vol I *Lef*, Vol I pp 3-7**

1905. Then reaction. Reaction set in with the autocracy and redoubled oppression of the merchant and factory-owner. Reaction created art, life – its own image and taste. The art of the Symbolists (Bely, Balmont), of the Mystics (Chulkov, Gippius) and of the sexual psychopaths (Rozanov) – the n. of the petty bourgeois and philistines. *The revolutionary parties waged war on reality, art rose up to wage war on taste.* The first impressionistic outburst – in 1909 (the collection 'The Fishpond of Judges').

The outburst was fanned for three years.

It was fanned into Futurism. The first book of the union of Futurists – 'A Slap in the Face of Public Taste' (1914 – Burlyuk D., Kamensky, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov). The old order correctly assessed the experimental work of the future dynamiters.

*The Futurists were answered with castigations of censure,*

prohibition of expression of views, with the *barking and howling* of all the press. Capitalists, of course, never patronised our whip-lines, our splinter-strokes.

Surrounding diocesan life made the Futurists jeer with their yellow shirts and painted faces.

These scarcely 'academic' devices of the struggle, a presentiment of our subsequent range, immediately scared off the adhering aesthetisers (Kandinsky, Knave of Diamonds group and others). So, whoever had nothing to lose tagged on to Futurism, or draped themselves with its name (Shershenevich, Igor Severyanin, the Ass's Tail and others). The Futurist movement, led by people in art, who scarcely understood politics, was sometimes also painted with the colours of anarchy.

Alongside people of the future went those trying to look young, screening their aesthetic putrefaction with the left flag.

The 1914 war was the first test of our social spirit.

*Russian Futurists once and for all broke with the poetic imperialism* of Marinetti, having already whistled at him earlier during his visit to Moscow (1913).

*The Futurists, first and alone in Russian art, smothering the clanking of the poets of war (Gorodetsky, Gumilev and others), execrated war, fought against it with all the weapons of art (Mayakovsky's 'War and the Universe'). War set off the Futurist purge (the 'Mezzanine' poets broke away, Severyanin went to Berlin).*

*War forced us to see the future revolution ('The Cloud in Trousers'). The February revolution deepened the purge, split Futurism into 'right' and 'left'.*

The rights became echoes of democratic fascinations (their names are in 'Fashionable Moscow').

The lefts, waiting for October, were christened the 'bolsheviks of art' (Mayakovsky, Kamensky, Burlyuk, Kruchenykh).

Joining this Futurist group were the first production-Futurists (Brik, Arvatov), and the Constructivists (Rodchenko, Lavinsky).

*The Futurists from the very outset, even while still in the Kshesinsky Palace, tried to come to an understanding with groups of worker-writers (the future Proletkult), but these writers thought, looking around at things, that revolutionary spirit is totally encompassed by agitational content alone, and in the realm of organisation remained complete reactionaries, quite unable to weld themselves together. October purged, shaped, reorganised. Futurism became the left front of art. We became 'We'.*

October taught us through work.

Already on October 25 we set to work.

It was obvious – at the sight of five members of the hot-footed intelligentsia they didn't ask us much about our aesthetic beliefs. We created, at that time revolutionary, 'IZO', 'TEO', 'MUZO'; we led participants in the storming of the academy. Together with

34 the organisational work we gave the first *things of art of the October era* (Tatlin – Monument to the 3rd International, ‘Mystery-Bouffe’ staged by Meyerhold, Kamensky’s ‘Stenka Razin’). We did not aesthetise, making things for self-admiration. We applied acquired skills for agitational-art work demanded by the revolution (placards for RosTA, newspaper feuilletons etc).

In order to propagate our ideas by agitation we organised the paper ‘Art of the Commune’ and a tour of factories and workshops with discussions and readings of our things.

Our ideas gained a workers’ audience. The Vyborg region organised the Com-Fut. The impetus of our art showed our strength of organisation of fortresses of the left front throughout the whole RSFSR. Parallel to this was the work of our Far-Eastern comrades (the journal ‘Creation’), who asserted theoretically the social necessity of our movement, our social unity with October (Chuzhak, Aseev, Palmov, Tretyakov). ‘Creation’, after undergoing all sorts of persecutions, took upon itself the whole struggle for the new culture in the confines of the Far Eastern Republic and in Siberia. Gradually becoming disillusioned in their belief in the nine-day wonder existence of Soviet power the academics, singly and in bunches, began to knock at the doors of the Narkompros.

Not risking using them in responsible work Soviet power gave them, or, more exactly, their European names, the cultural and educational backwaters. From these backwaters began the baiting of left art, which culminated brilliantly in the closure of ‘Art of the Commune’ etc.

The authorities, busy with the war fronts and devastation, hardly enquired into aesthetic disputes, trying simply to keep the rear from making too much noise, and to make us see reason out of respect for the ‘most eminent’. Now there is a respite from war and hunger. *Lef* is obliged to demonstrate the panorama of art of the RSFSR, to set perspectives and to occupy our rightful place.

Art of the RSFSR on February 1, 1923:

(1) Prolet-art. One part has degenerated into trite writers, wearying you with their bureaucratic language and repetition of their political ABC. Another part fell under the total influence of academicism, reminding you of October only by the names of their organisation. The third and best part, leaving behind the rose-coloured Belys, is re-learning with our things as guides, and, we believe, will go further with us.

(2) Official literature. In the theory of art each has his own personal opinion: Osinsky praises Akhmatova, Bukharin – Pinkerton. In practice they simply deck out the magazines with all the names in circulation.

(3) The ‘latest’ literature (the Serapions, Pilnyak and so on), having mastered and diluted our devices, lard them with the Sym-

(4) Change of landmarks. From the West the invasion of the enlightened venerables is drawing nigh. Alexei Tolstoy is already polishing up the white horse of the complete collection of his works ready for his triumphant entry into Moscow.

(5) And finally, violating the blessedly sedate perspective – in various corners the *individual 'lefts'*. People and organisations (INKHUK, VKHUTEMAS, GITIS of Meyerhold, OPOYAZ and others). Some strive heroically on their own to raise up overweighty virgin soil, others with their file-sharp lines still sever the shackles of antiquation: *Lef must collect together the forces of the left. Lef must review its ranks, rejecting the superfluous past. Lef must unite a front for the explosion of antiquity, for the fight for the embracement of the new culture.*

We shall resolve the problems of art not by the majority of voices of the mythical left front, which has existed up to now only as an idea, but by deed by the energy of our enterprising group, which year after year has been leading the work of the lefts and guiding it ideologically all the time. The Revolution taught us a lot.

*Lef knows:*

*Lef will:*

In working for the strengthening of the victories of the October Revolution, while reinforcing left art. *Lef will agitate art with the ideas of the commune*, opening up for art the road to tomorrow. *Lef will agitate the masses with our art*, acquiring organised strength in them. *Lef will support our theories with active art*, raising it to the highest working skill.

*Lef will fight for the art-construction of life.* We do not lay claim to a monopolisation of revolutionism in art. We shall find things out by competition. We believe that: by the correctness of our agitation, by the strength of the things we make, *we shall prove: we are on the correct road to the future.*

N. Aseev, B. Arvatov, O. Brik, B. Kushner, V. Mayakovsky, S. Tretyakov, N. Chuzhak.

#### Whom is *Lef* alerting? (Manifesto)

*Lef*, Vol I pp 10-11.

This is addressed to us. *Comrades in Lef!*

We know that we, the 'left' master-craftsmen, are the best workers in today's art. Up to the Revolution we piled up highly correct draft-plans, clever theorems and cunning formulae, for the forms of the new art.

One thing is clear: the slippery, globular belly of the bourgeoisie was a bad site for building.

During the Revolution we amassed a great many truths, we studied life, we received the task of building a very real structure

36 for the centuries ahead.

A world shaken by the booming of war and revolution is difficult soil for grandiose constructions.

We temporarily filed away our formulae, while helping to consolidate the days of revolution.

Now the globe of the bourgeois paunch exists no longer. Sweeping away the old with the revolution we cleared the field for the new structures of art at the same time. The earthquake is over. Cemented by spilt blood the USSR stands firmly.

It is time to start *big things*, *The seriousness of our attitude to ourselves is the one solid foundation for our work.*

#### *Futurists!*

Your services to art are great; but don't dream of living on the dividend of yesterday's revolutionary spirit. Show by your work today that your outburst is not the desperate wailing of the wounded intelligentsia, but a struggle, labouring shoulder to shoulder with all those who are straining towards the victory of the commune.

#### *Constructivists!*

Be on your guard against becoming just another aesthetic school. Constructivism in art alone is nothing. It is a question of the very existence of art. Constructivism must become the supreme formal engineering of the whole of life. Constructivism in a performance of shepherd pastorals is nonsense. Our ideas must be developed on the basis of present-day things.

#### *Production artists!*

Be on your guard against becoming applied-artist handicraftsmen.

In teaching the workers learn from the worker. In dictating aesthetic orders to the factory from your studios you become simply customers.

Your school is the factory floor.

#### *Formalists!*

The formal method is the key to the study of art. Every flea of a rhyme must be accounted for. But avoid catching fleas in a vacuum. Only together with the sociological study of art will your work become not only interesting, but necessary.

#### *Students!*

Avoid giving out the chance distortions of the dilettante striving for innovation, for the 'dernier cri' of art. The innovation of the dilettante is a steamship on the legs of a chicken.

Only in craftsmanship have you the right to throw out the old.

#### *Everyone together!*

As you go from theory to practice remember your craftsmanship, your technical skill.

Hackwork on the part of the young who have the strength for colossal things, is even more repulsive than the hackwork of the flabby little academics.

*Master and students of 'Lef'!*

The question of our very existence is being decided. The very greatest idea will perish if we do not mould it skilfully.

The most skilful forms will remain black threads in blackest night, will evoke merely the annoyance and irritation of those who stumble over them if we do not apply them to the shaping of the present day, the day of revolution.

*Lef is on guard.*

*Lef is the defender for all inventors.*

*Lef is on guard.*

*Lef will throw off all the old fuddy-duddies, all the ultra-aesthetes, all the copiers.*

*Lef*

### Into Production!

*Lef*, Vol I pp 105, 108.

Rodchenko was an abstract artist. He has become a Constructivist and production artist. Not just in name, but in practice.

There are artists who have rapidly adopted the fashionable jargon of Constructivism. Instead of 'composition' they say 'construction'; instead of 'to write' they say 'to shape'; instead of 'to create' - 'to construct'. But they are all doing the same old thing: little pictures, landscapes, portraits. There are others who do not paint pictures, and work in production, who also talk about material, texture, construction, but once again out come the very same age-old ornamental and applied types of art, little cockerels and flowers, or circles and dashes.

And there are still others, who do not paint pictures, and do not work in production - they 'creatively apprehend' the 'eternal laws' of colour and form. For them the real world of things does not exist, they wash their hands of it. From the heights of their mystical insights they contemptuously gaze upon anyone who profanes the 'holy dogmas' of art through work in production, or any other sphere of material culture.

Rodchenko is no such artist. Rodchenko sees that the problem of the artist is not the abstract apprehension of colour and form, but the practical ability to resolve any task of shaping a concrete object. Rodchenko knows that there aren't once-for-all set laws of construction, but that every new task must be resolved afresh, starting from the conditions set by the individual case.

Rodchenko knows that you won't do anything by sitting in your own studio, that you must go into real work, carry your own organising talent where it is needed - into production. Many who have glanced at Rodchenko's work will say: 'Where's the Constructivism in this? Where's he any different from applied art?' To them I say, the applied artist embellishes the object, Rodchenko shapes it. The applied artist looks at the object as a place for applying his own ornamental composition, while Rodchenko sees in the object

38 the material that underlies the design. The applied artist has nothing to do if he can't embellish an object – for Rodchenko a complete lack of embellishment is a necessary condition for the proper construction of the object.

| It is not aesthetic considerations, but the purpose of the object which defines the organisation of its colour and form.

At the moment things are hard for the Constructivist-production-artist. Artists turn their backs on him. Industrialists wave him away in annoyance. The man in the street goggles and, frightened, whispers: 'Futurist!' It needs tenacity and willpower not to lapse into the peaceful bosom of canonised art, to avoid starting to 'create' like the 'fair copy' artists, or to concoct ornaments for cups and handkerchiefs, or daub pictures for cosy dining-rooms and bedrooms.

Rodchenko will not go astray. He can spit on the artists and philistines and as for the industrialists he will break through and prove to them that only the productional-constructive approach to the object gives the highest proficiency to production. Of course, this will not happen quickly. It will come when the question of 'quality' moves to the forefront; but now, when everything is concentrated on 'quantity', what talk can there be of proficiency!

Rodchenko is patient. He will wait; meanwhile he is doing what he can – he is revolutionising taste, clearing the ground for the future non-aesthetic, but expedient, material culture. Rodchenko is right. It is evident to anyone with his eyes open that there is no other road for art than into production.

Let the company of 'fair-copyists' laugh as they foist their daubings onto the philistine aesthetes.

Let the 'applied artists' delight in dumping their 'stylish ornaments' on the factories and workshops.

Let the man in the street spit with disgust at the iron constructive power of Rodchenko's construction.

There is a consumer who does not need pictures and ornaments, and who is not afraid of iron and steel.

This consumer is the proletariat. With the victory of the proletariat will come the victory of constructivism.

Osip Brik

### Materialised Utopia

*Lef*, Vol I pp 61, 64

Towns of the future have existed in the past too: More, Fourier, Morris etc. Yet Lavinsky's project has a quite special new significance. Lavinsky has also created a town of the future. And this was naturally only to be expected. Not from Lavinsky. From today's revolutionary artists in general. For Lavinsky, of course, is only one particular case.

The romance of the commune, and not the idyll of the cottage.

That is the first thing. Secondly: previously it was only discussed (Wells and others), but Lavinsky has simply sketched it out. He has drawn it in his own style, unusually depictive — but what of it! There was just one purpose: to demonstrate, and not to discuss, and the purpose has been achieved. Thirdly, and most important: *the artist wanted to construct.*

One could name hundreds of professors, academics and so on who did not even 'want'. Yet architecture turned into form, ornamentation, the aesthetic cult of beauty. But what of the engineers? Of course they have been building, and still are. They build straightforwardly, in modern fashion, on the basis of the latest industrial techniques. But there's one odd thing: as long as they occupy themselves with specific structures (bridges, cranes, platforms) all goes well; but as soon as they take on a larger-scale construction it's enough to make the old familiar face of the aesthete peer out from beneath the mask of the engineer. Brought up on the canons of bourgeois art the engineer is almost always just as much of a fetishist as his blood-brother the architect. So engineering falls into the sweet embrace of aestheticism, and thereby voluntarily condemns itself either to a narrowing of the problems, or to social conservatism.

With all these facts in mind I maintain that Lavinsky's project, using engineering in its future dynamics, engineering as a universal method, engineering released from beneath the moulds of art and subordinated only to the law of socio-technical expediency, this project strikes at both the artist and the engineer. To the former it says plainly: *hands off the business of life, you who have remained on Parnassus.* The latter it summons to revolutionary boldness and to a break with traditional aesthetising, towards the organisation of life in all its extent.

This does not exhaust the significance of Lavinsky's experiment, however. Lavinsky is a Constructivist. What is Constructivism?

When the former artist set about using his material (paint etc), he regarded it only as a means of creating an impression. Such an impression was attained in the various forms of depiction. The artist 'reflected' the world, as people like to say. The furious growth of individualism broke up depictive art. Abstract art appeared. And at one and the same time, while some (the expressionists for example) were highly delighted with such a novelty, and, even though they did not crawl from the swamp of 'impressionistic' creation, tailored it in the style of metaphysics — others saw in the abstract form a new, unprecedented possibility. Not the creation of forms of the supremely 'aesthetic', but the expeditious construction of materials.

Not the 'end in itself', but 'value of content'. Replace the word 'content' by the word 'purpose', and you will understand what it's all about. But how can one speak of a 'purpose' in an abstract construction? Between the construction and the object there is a

40 gulf: the same sort as between art and production. But the Constructivists are still artists. The last of the Mohicans of a form of creation divorced from life represent themselves as the finish of the 'end in itself' nonsense, which eventually revolted against itself. Herein lies their great historical significance. But therein also is the tragedy of their situation. The crusaders of aestheticism are condemned to aestheticism until a bridge towards production can be found. But how can this bridge be built in a country where production itself is scarcely alive? Who will turn to the artist, who will permit himself the luxury of a gigantic, unprecedented experiment where it is necessary at present simply to 'hold-out'? And the proffered hand of the Constructivist will stay hanging in mid-air. That is why I do not smile when I look at Lavinsky's sketches. Pioneers always hold in their hands just a banner, and often a torn one at that. Surely they do not cease to be pioneers for that?

Manilov busied himself with utopias in his spare time: a little bridge, and on the bridge etc, etc. His utopias were born passively. The economist Sismondi created utopias of another sort – it was the past that fascinated him. Fourier was also a utopian, his utopia was a revolutionary one. Taking root in the bosom of the historical process such a utopia becomes a material force, which organises mankind. And that is when we can say with a capital letter: Utopia. For who does not know that without Fourier and others there would have been no Marx? It is to this particular category of utopias that Lavinsky's project belongs. If a 'materialised' utopia is at present only alliteratively similar to a 'realised' utopia, then one conclusion must follow: *help to realise the path indicated*. Or, finally: develop, continue further, reform, but do not turn aside. May this individual attempt, this romantic leap across the abyss turn into a collective, deliberate collaboration organised on laboratory lines. Abroad (eg in Germany) we are already aware of a series of experiments and projects for a future city. These efforts are considerably nearer to present-day Western resources than is Lavinsky's project to Russian resources. They are 'simpler', more realisable, more production-like. But they have a bad heredity: with an old architect for a father, and an expressionist painting for a mother, you won't get far beyond aestheticism!

A city in the air. A city of glass and asbestos. A city on springs. What is this – an eccentricity, a modish novelty, a trick? No – simply *maximum expediency*.

In the air – to release the earth.

Made of glass – to fill it with light.

Asbestos – to lighten the structure.

On springs – to create equilibrium.

All right, but as to the circular plan, surely it's that cursed old symmetry again? Yes, but not as form, but as an economic principle.

It's marvellous, but what purpose is there in these strange houses rotating? Who will dare say that this is not Futurism, the Futuristic aesthetisation of life? In other words: surely this is that same old aestheticism, but in a new guise? Such an objection may apply not only to the houses: it bears down even more heavily on the unusual appearance of the springs and the radio-station. This is surely Futurism, dynamics, a fracture, a confusion of planes and lines, antiquated displacements, all that old assortment of Italian Futurist pictorial rubbish.

Not at all! Because:

1. The rotation of the buildings pursues the very same everyday object as do Japanese houses made of paper. The difference is in the technique.
2. The springs and the radio are built as they are, and not otherwise, in the name of freedom and economy of space.

There is still one question, this time the last: are such systems technically possible? How will theoretical mechanics react to them? I do not know. I am ready to assume the worst – that a literal realisation of the plan in all its details is unthinkable either with today's or with any other level of technique. 'My business is to make suggestions . . .' as Mayakovsky declared to the angels. Lavinsky declares the very same thing to the engineers, since what has chiefly concerned Lavinsky is the social side of the matter – *the form of the new life*. Let the engineers now say (they are not angels, fortunately) what is possible and what is not possible, how they can amend, and where they can amplify. That would not be useless work.

Boris Arvatov

### Our Literary Work

*Lef*, Vol I pp 40-1

The ancients divided artistic literature into poetry and prose. Both poetry and prose had their own linguistic canons. Poetry: sugared metres (iambics, trochees, or the mishmash of 'free verse'), a special poetic vocabulary ('steed', and not 'horse'; 'offspring', and not 'child', and all the other 'moon-June'; 'eyes-sighs' rhymes), and its own petty little 'poetic' themes (previously love and the night, nowadays flames and blacksmiths).

Prose: specially stilted heroes (he + she + lover = the short-story writers; intellectual + girl + policeman = the realists; someone in grey + a strange woman + Christ = the Symbolists) and its own literary-artistic style (1. 'the sun was setting behind the hill' + 'they loved or killed' = 'outside the poplars are rustling'; 2. 'I'll tell you this, Vanyatka' + 'the chairman of the orphans' court was a hard drinker' = 'we will glimpse heaven in diamonds yet'; 3. 'how strange, Adelaida Ivannovna' + 'the terrible secret was spreading' = 'in a white halo of roses').

42 Both the poetry and the prose of the ancients were equally distant from practical speech, from the slang of the streets, and from the exact language of science.

We have dispersed the old literary dust, using only the scrap-iron of antiquity. We do not want to know the difference between poetry, prose and practical language. We know only a single material of the word, and we throw it into a modern treatment. We are working on the organisation of the sounds of language, on polyphony of rhythm, on the simplification of word constructions, on the greater precision of linguistic expressivity, on the manufacture of new thematic devices.

All this work is for us – not an aesthetic end in itself, but a laboratory for the best possible expression of the facts of the present day.

We are not priest-creators, but master-executors of the social command. The practical works published in 'LEF' are not 'absolute artistic revelations', but merely specimens of our current work.

*Aseev*: Experiment of a linguistic flight into the future.

*Kamensky*: Play on the word in all its tonality.

*Kruchenykh*: Experiment of using the phonetics of slang to construct anti-religious and political themes.

*Pasternak*: Application of dynamic syntax to a revolutionary task.

*Tretyakov*: Experiment of a marching-type construction, organising revolutionary spontaneity.

*Khlebnikov*: Attainment of maximal expressivity through conversational speech free of any former poetic spirit.

*Mayakovsky*: Experiment of polyphonic rhythm in wide-ranging poetry of social and everyday matters.

*Brik*: Experiment of laconic prose on a contemporary theme.

*Wittvogel*: Experiment of the Communist agit-stage without the usual Kaiser/Toller revolutionary mysticism.

V. V. Mayakovsky

O. M. Brik

#### The So-Called 'Formal Method'

*Lef*, Vol I pp 213-5

'Opoyaz' and its so-called 'formal method' has become a bugbear to the literary pontiffs and priestling dabblers in literature. This impudent attempt to approach the poetic icons from a scientific point of view evoked a storm of indignation. A 'league of resistance to the formal method' was formed, or, to be more exact, a 'league of resistance to the removal of poetic values'.

This would not be worth mentioning, were there not several Marxists, albeit moth-eaten ones, among the 'resisters'. This calls for an explanation.

'Opoyaz' maintains that *there are no poets and writers – there*

*are just poetry and writing.* Everything that a poet writes is meaningful as a part of his general work, and is totally worthless as an expression of his 'I'. If a poetic work can be comprehended as a 'human document', like an entry in a diary, it is interesting to the author, to his wife, relatives, friends and maniacs of the type who passionately seek the answer to the riddle 'was Pushkin a smoker?' – and to no one else.

43

*The poet is an expert in his own business.* And that is all. But to be a good expert you must know the needs of those for whom you are working, you must live one life with them. Otherwise your work won't come off and will be useless. The social role of the poet cannot be understood from an analysis of his individual qualities and habits. A *mass study of the devices of the poetic craft is necessary*, these devices to be distinguished from the estimative areas of human labour; also the laws of their historical development. Pushkin was not the founder of a school, but simply its leader. If Pushkin had never existed 'Eugene Onegin' would still have been written. And America would have been discovered without Columbus. We have no history of literature yet. There is just a history of the 'generals' of literature; 'Opojaz' will make possible the writing of this history. The poet is an expert of the word, a word-creator, serving his own class, his own social group. What to write about it intimated to him by the consumer. *Poets do not invent themes, they take them from their surrounding milieu.* The work of the poet starts with the processing of the theme, with finding a corresponding linguistic form for it.

Studying poetry means studying the laws of this linguistic processing. *The history of poetry is the history of the development of the devices of linguistic fashioning.* Why poets have taken this or that actual theme, and not others, is explained by their belonging to this or that social group, and has no connection with their poetic work. This is important for the poet's biography, but the history of poetry is not a book of 'Lives of the Saints', and must not be like one.

Why poets used certain devices, and not others, in the processing of themes, what causes the appearance of a new device, how an old one dies off – this is the subject for the most thorough research of scientific poetics. 'Opojaz' marks off its work from the work of adjacent scientific disciplines not in order to go 'out of this world' but in order to establish and expand a series of the most vital problems of man's literary activity in the neatest way possible.

'Opojaz' studies the laws of poetic production. Who will dare prevent it doing so?

What does 'Opojaz' contribute to the proletarian construction of culture?

(1) A scientific system instead of a chaotic accumulation of facts and personal opinions.

44 (2) A social evaluation of creative people instead of an idolatrous interpretation of the 'language of the gods'.

(3) A knowledge of the laws of production instead of a 'mystical' penetration into the 'secrets' of creation.

*'Opoyaz' is the best educator for the young proletarian writers.*

The 'prolet-poets' are still afflicted with the thirst for 'self-revelation'. They constantly tear themselves away from their class. They do not want to be simply 'prolet-poets'. They look for 'cosmic', 'planetary' or 'deep' themes. They think that in his theme the poet must leap out of his milieu, that only then will he reveal himself and create - the 'eternal'.

'Opoyaz' will show them that everything great has been created in answer to questions of the day, that the 'eternal' today was then a topic of the time, and that the great poet does not reveal himself, but simply carries out the social command.

*'Opoyaz' will help its comrade prolet-poets to overcome the traditions of bourgeois literature*, by scientifically proving its moribundity and counter-revolutionism.

'Opoyaz' will come to the aid of proletarian creation not with hazy little chats about the 'proletarian spirit' and 'communist consciousness', but with the exact technical meanings of the devices of contemporary poetic creation. *'Opoyaz' is the grave-digger of poetic idealistics.* It is useless to fight it. And all the more so for Marxists.

O. M. Brik

\* Richard Sherwood's introduction and the preceding translations were first published in Form No 10 (October, 1969).

Ideology and Problems of Soviet Architecture (extract)  
Lef Vol 7, pp 95, 97-108

### Two Words about Constructivism

Soviet Russia desperately needs techniques, developed techniques in all spheres of culture without fail.

This period of attack on techniques on a wide front is a transitional period to socialism, the Constructivist period.

And the Constructivists are those people, as Plekhanov says, 'who find detrimental the old order' of abstract-aesthetic ornamentation, and with all their strength they put stress on technical problems with the new unbending spring of ideology, sometimes with total lack of consideration for artistic problems.

However, it is still a very long way from here to the narrow-minded liquidation of art and dumping it overboard. Not a single serious Constructivist would try to deny the tremendous significance in architecture - of art. The nub of the matter is simply that art must be placed in a subordinate position, corresponding with practical aims, and must be employed functionally.

Korneliy Zelinsky

### The Basic Tenets of Constructivism

(1) The character of contemporary production techniques – rapid, economical and large-scale – also influences the methods of ideological conceptions, subordinating general cultural processes to these internal, formally organised demands.

*Constructivism* is also an expression of this heightened attention to technical and organisational problems.

(2) Here in the USSR Constructivism is acquiring a wide social and cultural significance, as a result of the need to cover, in a relatively short time, the space which separates the proletariat, as a culturally backward class, from high-level present-day techniques, and from the entire developed system of cultural superstructures which, in the context of the intensifying class struggle throughout the world, are exploited by the bourgeoisie, as also are the technical weapons of the struggle.

(3) An organisational ordering of this problem, which was designated by Lenin as a problem of cultural education, is represented by Constructivism.

(4) Thus, Constructivism is a set of systematised ideas and social attitudes of mind which emphatically reflect the organisational impact of a working class which, in a predominately peasant country, has been forced, after the attainment of power, to build the economy and lay the foundation of the new socialist culture.

(5) This organisational impact in the cultural sphere is directed primarily at its technology in all spheres of knowledge and learning, beginning with the simple mastery of literacy.

(6) The bearer of the Constructivist (ie energetic and organised) and cultural education movement must be, above all, the proletariat, and, after that, the intermediate social groups who are under the ideo-political influence of the proletariat.

(7) Constructivism, transferred into the realm of art, is formally transformed into a *system of maximum exploitation of theme*, or into a system of mutual functional justification of all the component artistic elements. That is: as a whole, *Constructivism is motivated art*.

(8) In a formal respect such a requirement is based on the so-called principle of loadification, ie the increasing of the loading of demands on the unity of material.

(9) Rightist social strata, the intelligentsia and petty-bourgeoisie groups, are adapting the formal demands of Constructivism to use as aesthetic fox-holes in which to sit out the onslaught of revolutionary modernity, which seeks to consolidate its place in the themes of art. In this case Constructivism changes into a special easel-art genre, ie a non-motivated demonstration of the device.

46 This is equally true in respect of both painting and poetry.

For the leftist social strata this demand for maximal exploitation is naturally fused with the search for a great epic theme and for a compact form for this theme, which, through the logic of the subject, introduces the devices of prose into poetry.

(10) The principle of loadification, in its application to poetry changes into a need for the construction of verse to the pattern of local semantics, ie the development of the whole textures of the verse out of the basic semantic content of the theme.

(11) The group of Constructivist-poets, taking the above-mentioned tenets as its banner, is an organised grouping of people with a Communist ideology, who take it upon themselves, by way of the joint practical study of the formal-technical, and theoretical aspects of Constructivism, to give a real sense to poetry in the contemporary social setting.

The Constructivists consider it essential in their poetic work to reflect revolutionary contemporaneity, both thematically, *and in relation to its technical needs*.

The Constructivists aim to take possession of the poetic section of the general front of cultural education, seen as being a broad constructivism of the working class in the transitional era of struggle for communism.

Moscow, August 1924.

#### Utopia or Science? (extracts)

Lef Vol 4 pp 16-21

The production-artists from 'Lef' believe that art must fuse with socio-material life-construction, and demand this fusion immediately.

Since an effective and full penetration of art into everyday life is possible only in a constituted Communist society, the production-artists are no more than Utopianists.

The Utopianism of the production-artists is evident also in their rejection of depictive and decorative art, and in their dogmatic approach to constructional art. . . .

In fact the 'Lefists' believe that, in spite of the remoteness of a *full* realisation of their forecast, it is necessary right at the present moment to proceed to a *partial* realisation of the problems of production art.

The 'Lefists', finally, postulate a polytechnical transformation of our art schools, the setting up of experimental work in model factories and the invention of standard forms of material existence, if only in the sphere of furniture, clothing production etc, which would be not only economically but also ideologically advantageous by the one fact that this would be a blow to the debauched applied art which has flourished in proletarian art (witness the uniform of the Red Army, the equipment of the Agricultural Exhibition etc).

. . . Decisively repudiating the easel-painting of the drawing-room

and museum the 'Lefists' are fighting for the placard, for the illustration, the advertisement, photo- and cine-montage, ie for those types of utilitarian-representational art which could be art for the masses, put into effect by means of machine techniques, and closely tied to the material life of the urban industrial workers. In this sense the 'Lefists' are 'applied artists'.

. . . The easel-painting, which fosters passive admiration of illusion and diverges from life, is for this very reason not suited to become an efficient weapon in the hands of the proletariat.

. . . *The problem of proletarian transitional, depictive artistic creation is the problem of agit-art – of art that is propagandistic not only in theme, but in its devices of material structure.*

. . . The 'Lefists' are convinced and consistent industrialists in art. This is their maximum programme. Only through it can the 'Lefists' build their minimum programme, their present-day tactics.

. . . Two contradictory views were evident after Lef's appearance:—

The first:

Those devices and forms of creation which are produced on the stage of the theatre must be brought into life – to theatricalise life. This is the view of N. Evreinov, the view of an aesthetiser of life, the view of the 'pure' artist, of the stage director wanting to subordinate reality to the devices of his own narrow, little speciality, – to introduce into life so-called 'beauty'.

The second:

The theatre must be reconstructed on the foundations of an overall social, extra-aesthetic science and technology (physical culture, psycho-techniques and so on), with aesthetic formalism expelled from it. Only those artists who have grown up in this new 'life-infused' theatre will be able to give us a strictly utilitarian, Taylorised shaping of life, instead of the theatricalisation of life.

*To 'transform' life* – this is what Evreinov wants.

*To construct life purposefully* – this is what the 'Lefists' are striving for.

The 'Lefists' are against, and not for the theatricalisation of life.

The 'Lefists' demand production methods, a production-consciousness, production-attitude and approach to every sphere of art without exception. We must not sanctify industrial, collective life with the 'beauties' of easel-art theatre, but totally subordinate the theatre to the constructive methods and problems of collectivised industrial life.

*We must not speak about the art of the revolution without a precise maximum-programme. We must not, while mastering Marxism, consider this sufficient and mark time while manoeuvring among the contemporary art movements, granting them complete 'independence' of action. The arbitrariness of social development*

48 opposes the interests of the working class, even where it is a question of such a 'high' matter as art. The working class will construct its own art on the basis of scientific foresight and consciously planned and organised practical work, ie in the same way that it acts in politics and economics. The theory of production art offers the working class here and now the prospect of progressing from Utopia to Science.

B. Arvatov

### From Picture to Calico-print

Lef Vol 6 pp 27, 30-31, 34

The propaganda of production art is now crowned with success.

It is becoming obvious that art culture is not totally covered by objects for exhibitions and museums, that, in particular, painting is not 'pictures', but the entire aggregate of the pictorial designing of life.

The calico-print is just the same sort of product of art culture as the picture, and there is no foundation for drawing any sort of dividing line between the two.

Moreover, the belief is growing that the picture is dying, that it is inextricably bound to the forms of the capitalist system, to its cultural ideology, and that the calico-print is now moving into the centre of creative attention, — that calico, and work on it, are now the peaks of art work.

This is a fact. Our cultural creative work is now entirely purpose-orientated. We do not think up for ourselves any cultural work that does not pursue some definite practical aim. The concepts of 'pure science', 'pure art', and 'self-valuable truths and beauties' are foreign to us. We are practitioners, — and in this lies the distinguishing feature of our cultural consciousness.

The easel-art picture can find no place in such a consciousness. For its strength and significance lie in its non-utilitarianism, in the fact that it serves no other purpose than that of pleasing, of 'delighting the eye'.

All attempts to turn an easel-painting into an agit-picture are fruitless. Not because no talented artist could be found to do it, but because it is unthinkable in its very essence.

The easel painting is intended for a prolonged existence, to last for years and even centuries. But what agit-theme could last for such a time? What agit-picture would not be obsolete within a month? And if the theme of the agit-picture were obsolete, what would there be left in it?

A theme of short-lived effect must not be dealt with by devices intended for a lengthy existence. A one-day object must not be built to last centuries.

This is why the agit-picture cannot bear comparison with the agit-poster, this is why there are no good agit-pictures.

The 'pure' easel-artists have exercised good judgement in refus-

ing to work on agit-themes. They realise that this way the easel-painting will perish, that it loses its basic values — its 'timeless', 'non-utilitarian' significance, and that the poster will outdo it. They are therefore making desperate attacks to save it by another method:—to impress on one and all that the easel-painting is, in its purely formal sense, a huge cultural fact, that without it any art culture is unthinkable.

They maintain that if no easel-paintings are made, then art culture will perish, that the creative 'freedom' which is apparent in the making of these easel-paintings must not be extinguished for a single second, otherwise art will end.

Let the theme of the picture be trivial, let there be an abstract 'free' play of the pictorial forms, — this is unimportant; what is important is that this non-temporal, non-utilitarian, 'purely aesthetic' value will continue to exist, that one will be able to glance at it, be imbued with it — and art culture will be saved.

This is how monks reason. Their righteous life outside the world saves the world.

And yet the easel-artists are right. If the painting can be saved it is only in this way.

If it is true that the easel-painting is necessary for the existence of art culture, that without it art culture will perish, then, of course, we must take every step to encourage its development and well-being.

But it is not true. The easel-painting is not only unnecessary to our present day art culture, but is one of the most powerful brakes to its development. And this is why.

Of course, the chief evil is not in the monkish reasonings of the 'pure' easel-artists. These can easily be dispelled by the light of anti-religious, anti-aesthetic propaganda. What is bad is that these monkish dogmas are turned into productional and pedagogical principles.

The nub of the matter is that the easel-artists do not deny the importance and necessity of other forms of art culture. They fully allow the existence of agit-posters, sketches for calico-printing, and book covers; they simply maintain that without easel-painting all these 'secondary' aspects are unthinkable, that easel-painting is the creative base on which all the culture of painting is constructed.

Hence the conclusion that if you want to make good calico-prints, learn how to paint landscapes.

The easel-artists argue thus: the artist, wherever he works, whatever he does, must be master of an art culture, must be artistically educated. This art culture, this art education, is given to him by easel-painting.

Having mastered the 'secrets' of easel-painting, he thereby masters the 'secrets' of every sort of painting work, be it calico, the book-cover, the poster, or theatre decoration.

And this is where the easel-artists are cruelly wrong.

50 The painting is the product of a certain aspect of artistic work. To make a painting one must expend a certain quantity of technical devices and skills, namely those devices and skills with which a picture can be made. Why does it follow that these devices and skills are universal? Why does it suddenly turn out that the devices and skills suitable for one craft are right for any other?

Let us admit that partial coincidences are also possible, that part of the devices may be universally used; but why should one craft be basic in relation to another? Why should the making of a still-life be more basic than the making of a calico-print? Why should one first learn to make still-life pictures, and then proceed to calico-prints, and not the other way round?

The easel-artists like to compare pure easel-painting with pure mathematics. They say that both of them give general principles, general propositions, which can then be applied in practice.

But the easel-artists forget that a picture is not science, but practical work, and cannot establish any 'general' propositions. The experience of the easel-painter is not the experience of the artist in general, but merely the experience of one particular case of pictorial work.

The easel-artists want to vindicate their right of existence.

If easel-art died, as a socially necessary aspect of artistic craft, then, they say, let it come back to life as a universal artistic method, as the highest school of all artistic practical work.

This is how the zealots of classical antiquity tried to vindicate the need for Greek and Latin in secondary schools.

But the pedagogic universality of easel-art can be disproved not only by theoretical arguments, but also by everyday practical experience.

The sad fate of artists who have passed through the easel-art school, and then try to apply their knowledge and skills in production, is well known. Nothing comes of it.

However, the easel-artist, by and large, doesn't care a thing about production. The acknowledgment of production art is an empty phrase in his mouth.

If work in production were always to remain art of the lowest sort it would be all the same to him. This is why it is not the easel-artists who will find methods for this type of work, and it will not be from easel-art that the solution of the problems of production art will come.

Only those artists who have broken once and for all with easel-artistry, who have in fact recognised production work as not only an equally legitimate aspect of art work, but as the only one possible, — only these artists can undertake the solving of the problems of present-day art culture productively and successfully.

Among these artists, as yet still few in number, are the members of INKHUK:—Rodchenko, Lavinsky, Vesnin, Stepanova, Johanson, Senkin, Klutsis and the late Lyubov Popova.

There is one very serious objection that the easel-artists make against the production artists. They say: *Your works are no different from the most primitive sort of applied art; you are doing just what applied artists have always done, 'applying' easel drawings to factory-produced objects. But what will you do if there are to be no easel-works? What will you 'apply'?*

It is true that art work, and factory or workshop work, are still separate. The artist is still an alien in the factory. People react suspiciously to him, they do not let him get close. They do not trust him. They cannot understand why he must know the technical processes, why he should have information of a purely industrial nature. His business is to draw, to make drawings — and it is the business of the factory to choose suitable ones from among them and stick them on ready-made manufactures.

The basic idea of production art, that the external appearance of a thing is determined by its economic purpose and not by abstract, aesthetic considerations, is still insufficiently apprehended by our industrialists, and it seems to them that the artist, in seeking to delve into the 'economic secret' of the object, is poking his nose into other people's business.

Hence the inevitable applied art, — a result of the alienation of the artist from production. As he does not receive the necessary economic directives he involuntarily falls back on aesthetic stereotypes.

What conclusion can be drawn from this?

Forward! — to the overcoming of this alienation.

Forward! — to the union of artist and factory.

And never: backwards — to pure easel work, or backwards — to little pictures.

Leading artists have already set out on the road from picture to calico-print, and of course they will not turn back. But this is only the beginning. The entire mass of young artists must understand that this road is the only true one, that it is along this road that the development of art culture will proceed.

It is necessary for our industrialists to understand their rôle in this matter, since on this depends the acceleration of this historical process.

The initiative of the director of the first cotton-printing factory in Moscow (formerly the Tsindel), comrade Arkhangelsky, and of Professor Viktorov, who invited the artists Stepanova and Popova to work there, is worthy of great attention and praise.

And if it still too early to speak about the results of this first experiment, then it is essential to mention its huge cultural value.

The art culture of the future is being made in the factories and workshops, and not in attic studios.

Let young artists remember this, if they want to avoid falling prematurely into the archives, together with the haughty easel-artists.

O. Brik

Lef Vol 3, pp 135-143

Looking at the pictures that have come to us from the West and from America, and bearing in mind the information we have about the work and experiments abroad and at home, I arrive at this conclusion:—

The death sentence passed by film-directors in 1919 on every film without exception is effective to this very day.

The most thorough observation reveals not a single picture, not a single experiment directed, as they should be, towards the *emancipation of the film-camera*, which remains wretchedly enslaved, subordinated to the *imperfect, undiscerning human eye*.

We are not protesting at the *undermining* of literature and the theatre by the cinema, and we fully sympathise with the use of the cinema for all branches of science, but we define these functions of the cinema as side-lines diverging from the main line.

**The basic and most important thing is:  
CINEMA-PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD.**

The starting-point is: *use of the film-camera as a cinema-eye, more perfect than the human eye for fathoming the chaos of those visual phenomena which evoke spatial dimension.*

The cinema-eye lives and moves in time and space, apprehends and fixes impressions in quite a different way from that of the human eye. The position of our bodies at the moment of observation, the number of features perceived by us in one or another visual phenomenon in one second of time is not at all binding on the film-camera, which, the more perfect it is, the more and the better will perceive things.

We cannot make our eyes better than they are already made,

**LEGALISED  
SHORT-  
SIGHTEDNESS**

**Make way for the  
machine!**

**DOWN WITH  
16 frames a  
second!**

but we can perfect the film-camera without limit.

53

Up to today the film-cameraman has many a time suffered rebukes about a running horse which on the screen moved unnaturally slowly (rapid turning of the film-camera handle), or, conversely, about a tractor which ploughed a field too quickly (slow turning of the film-camera handle) and so on.

These are accidents, of course, but we are preparing a system, a contrived system of cases like these, a system of *apparent* irregularities which probe into and organise phenomena.

Up to today we have coerced the film-camera and made it copy the work of our own eyes. And the better the copying, the more highly was the shot considered.

From today we are liberating the camera and making it work in the opposite direction, furthest away from copying.

All the weaknesses of the human eye are external. We affirm the cinema-eye, that gropes in the chaos of movements for a resultant force for its own movement, we affirm the cinema-eye with its dimension of time and space, growing in its own strength and its own resources to reach self-affirmation.

### ACCIDENTAL dislocation and concentration of **DISLOCATION**

**Do not copy  
the eye**

**THE MACHINE  
and its career**

2.

. . . I force the spectator to see in the way most advantageous for me to show this or that visual phenomenon. The eye is subordinated to the will of the film-camera and directed by it onto those consecutive moments of action, which in the briefest and

## **THE SYSTEM OF CONSECUTIVE MOVEMENTS**

clearest way lead the cinema-phrase to the heights or depths of resolution.

For example: a shot of boxing, not from the point of view of a

spectator present at the match, but a shot of the consecutive movements (methods) of the boxers.  
or: a shot of a group of dancers — but not from the viewpoint of a spectator sitting in a hall with a ballet on stage in front of him.

It is known that a spectator at a ballet watches haphazardly sometimes the general group of dancers, sometimes separate dancers at random, and sometimes somebody's feet:—*a series of incoherent impressions, different for each single spectator.*

We must not present the cinema audience with this.

The system of consecutive movements demands shots of the dancers or boxers as an exposition of the tricks presented one after the other, with the *forced* transference of the spectator's eyes onto those successive details which must be seen.

*The film-camera drags the eyes of the audience* from hands to feet, from feet to eyes, and so on in the best order possible, and organises details into a regular montage-study.

**The most disadvantageous, most uneconomic transmission of a scene — is a THEATRICAL ONE**

### 3.

You can be walking along the street in Chicago today, in 1923, but I can make you bow to the late comrade Volodarsky, who in 1918 is walking along a street in Petrograd, and he will return your bow.

Another example: the coffins of national heroes are lowered into their tombs (taken in Astrakhan in 1918), the tombs are filled in (Kronstadt, 1921), a gun salute (Petrograd, 1920) eternal remembrance, hats are removed (Moscow, 1922) — such things can be fitted together even from thankless material which was not specially filmed (see *Kino-Pravda* No 13). A further example of this is the montage of the greetings of the crowd and the montage of the salute of the vehicles for comrade Lenin (*Kino-Pravda* No 14), taken in different places, at different times.

**MONTAGE  
in time  
and space**

*The cinema-eye — the montaged 'I see !'*

... I am the cinema-eye. I am a constructor.

I have set you down, you who have today been created by me,

in a most amazing room, which did not exist up to this moment, also created by me.

In this room are 12 walls filmed by me in various parts of the world.

Putting together the shots of the walls and other details I was able to arrange them in an order which pleases you, and which will correctly construct by intervals the cinema-phrase, which is in fact a room.....

I am the cinema-eye, I create a man more perfect than Adam was created, I create thousands of different people from various preliminary sketches and plans.

I am the cinema-eye.  
I take from one person the strongest and deftest hands, from another I take the strongest and swiftest legs, from a third the most beautiful and expressive head and I create a new, perfect man in a montage. . . .

## 4.

... I am the cinema-eye. I am a mechanical eye.  
I, a machine, can show you the world as only I can see it.  
From today I liberate myself for ever from human immobility.  
*I am in perpetual motion, I approach and move away from objects, I creep up to them, I climb onto them, I move alongside the muzzle of a running horse, I tear into the crowd at full speed, I run before the fleeing soldiers, I tip over onto my back, I ascend with aeroplanes, I fall and rise together with falling and rising bodies.*

Here am I, the camera, rushing about guided by a resultant force, manoeuvring in the chaos of motions, fixing motion from motion in the most complex combinations.

Freed from the obligation of 16-17 frames a second, freed from the limits of time and space, *I can contrast any points in the universe*, wherever I might fix them.

**FELLOWSHIP OF  
FILM-DIRECTORS  
THE COUNCIL  
OF THREE  
Moscow,  
Today 3 Today  
APR 3 IL  
Hall of Intervals  
LECTURE  
By Dz. V. on  
THE ROOM  
CINEMA-PHRASE  
START at 8 p.m.**

**ELECTRIC  
YOUTH .**

**FILMING  
from  
MOTION**

My way leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world.  
And this is how I can decipher anew a world unknown to you.

## 5.

. . . Once again let us settle one thing: the eye and the ear.  
The ear does not spy and the eye does not eavesdrop.

*A division of functions:*

*The radio-ear – the montaged 'I hear!'*

*The cinema-eye – the montaged 'I see!'*

*This is for you, citizens, for a start, instead of music, painting, theatre, cinema and other castrated effusions.*

Amid the chaos of motions rushing past, rushing away, rushing forward and colliding together – into life comes simply *the eye*.

The day of visual impressions has passed. How can a day's impressions be constructed into an effective whole in a visual study?

If everything that the eye saw were to be photographed onto a film there would naturally be confusion. If it were artistically assembled, what was photographed would be clearer.

If the encumbering rubbish were thrown out, it would be still better. We shall obtain an organised manual of impressions of the *ordinary eye*.

The mechanical eye – the film-camera refusing to use the human eye as a crib, repelled and attracted by motions, gropes about in the chaos of visual events for the path for its own motion or oscillation, and experiments by stretching time, breaking up its motions, or, vice versa, absorbing time into itself, swallowing up the years, thereby schematizing prolonged processes which are inaccessible to the normal eye. . . .

. . . To the aid of the machine-age comes the *cinéaste-pilot*, who not only controls the motions of the camera, but who trusts in it during spatial experimentation, and the *cinéaste-engineer*, who controls the cameras at a distance.

organisation of  
observations  
of the  
**HUMAN**  
eye

organisation  
of observations  
of the  
**MECHANICAL**  
eye

Dislocation and  
Concentration of  
Visual  
Phenomena

The result of this sort of combined action of the liberated and perfected camera, and of the strategic brain of man directing, observing and taking stock of things, is a noticeably fresher, and therefore interesting, presentation of even the most ordinary things. . . .

## THE BRAIN

. . . How many people are there thirsting for spectacular shows that wear out their trousers in the theatres?

They flee from the daily round, they flee from the prose of life. And yet the theatre is almost always just a wretched counterfeit of that very same life plus a stupid conglomeration of the affectations of ballet, musical squeaks, lighting effects, decorations (from the daubing-type to the constructive-type) and sometimes the excellent work of a literary master, perverted by all the rubbish. Certain masters of the theatres are destroying the theatres from the inside, breaking the old forms and declaring new slogans for work in the theatre; brought in to help this are bio-mechanics (a good exercise in itself), the cinema (glory and honour to it), writers (not bad in themselves), constructions (there are good ones), motor-cars (how can one not respect a motor-car?), and gun-fire (a dangerous and impressive trick in the front rows), but in general not a single feature stands out in it.

Theatre, and nothing more.

Not only not a synthesis, but not even a regular miscellany. And it cannot be otherwise.

We, the film-makers, are determined opponents of premature synthesis ('to synthesis as the zenith of achievement!'), and realise it is pointless to mix up fragments of achievement: the poor infants immediately perish through overcrowding and disorder. And in general —

## THE ARENA IS SMALL

Please let's get into life.

*This is where we work — we, the masters of vision — organisers of visible life, armed with the ever-present cinema-eye.*

*This is where the masters of words and sounds work, the most skilful montage-makers of audible life. And I venture to slip in with them the ubiquitous mechanical ear and mouthpiece — the radio-telephone.*

It means **THE NEWSREEL FILM**

and **THE RADIO NEWSREEL**

I intend to stage a parade of film-makers in Red Square on the occasion of the *Futurists'* issuing of the first edition of the montaged radio-newsreel.

58 Not the 'Pathé' newsreel-films or Gaumont (a newspaper-type 'newsreel') and not even 'Kino-Pravda' (a political 'newsreel'), but a genuine cinema newsreel - a swift review of VISUAL events deciphered by the film-camera, pieces of REAL energy (I distinguish this from theatrical energy), brought together at intervals to form an accumulative whole by means of highly skilled montage.

This structure for the cinema-thing allows any theme to be developed, whether comic, tragic, contrived or anything else.

The whole trick lies in this or that juxtapositioning of visual features, the whole trick lies in the intervals.

The unusual flexibility of the montage-construction permits any political, economic, or other motifs to be brought into the cinema-study. And that is why

*FROM TODAY neither psychological nor detective dramas are needed in the cinema*

*FROM TODAY theatrical productions taken onto film are not needed*

*FROM TODAY neither Dostoyevsky nor Nat Pinkerton need be scripted*

*Everything can be included in the new concept of the newsreel film.*

These two things now make a decisive entry into the muddle of life:

- (1) the *cinema-eye*, which disputes the visual presentation of the world by the human eye, and presents its 'I see!' and,
- (2) the *cinéaste-montageur*, who organises moments of life-construction now seen in *cinema-eye* fashion for the first time.

Dziga Vertov

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Edited and introduced by Ben Brewster

In the 1930's, the adjective 'formalist', originally a derogatory designation for the Russian school of literary criticism centred around Opojaz (The Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and the Moscow Linguistics Circle which considered poetry and literature from the standpoint of their linguistic resources, was extended to apply to the whole range of avant-garde art, literature and music, and counterposed to 'realism', in particular, 'socialist realism'. Despite its crudity, this opposition seems to encapsulate many of the differences between the avant-garde art and literature of the 1920's in Russia and the art and literature characteristic of the USSR in the 1930's and 40's; moreover, it corresponds closely to the set of oppositions between the dominant trends in 19th and 20th century art recently suggested by David Morse in an article on Eisenstein in *Monogram* no 1 (p 29). It therefore appears paradoxical that the spearhead of the Russian avant-garde in the 1920's, the Left Front of the Arts (*Lef*) should, in 1927-8, proclaim 'factography' as the correct task of the revolutionary artist, and describe the newspaper, the documentary film and the photograph as the 'art' of the future. Art as a device, the original slogan of the formalists, seems to have been rejected in favour of a realism more complete than any demanded in the 1930's.

A simple explanation immediately comes to mind. *Novy Lef*, the magazine in which the following articles appeared, was published by the Left Front of the Arts in 1927-8, more than a year after *Lef*, the Front's first magazine, ceased publication, and Mayakovsky proclaimed that it was going to be 'more left than *Lef*'. The period in which *Novy Lef* appeared was the period in which the politico-literary scene was dominated by VAPP (later RAPP), the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. Was the new programme of *Novy Lef* an attempt to come to terms with the increasing political pressure on the artist in the late 1920's in the USSR? While I do not think this view wholly incorrect, I think it should be qualified in three respects.

First, literature of fact was not so alien to futurism as it might at first sight seem. Marinetti's futurist writing, from *Zang Tuum Tuuum* (1914) via *Alcova d'Acciaio* (1921) to *Il Grande Milano Tradizionale e Futurista* (1944), is all based on factual reporting, the first being the impressions of a correspondent in the First Balkan War, the second an account of Marinetti's wartime experiences as the driver of an armoured car, and the third, memories of his youth. In Russia itself, Mayakovsky's post-revolutionary poetry

- 60 was characterised by the adoption of the non-literary modes of the political leaflet or resolution and the advertisement (the Proletkult denounced the 'advertising artist Mayakovsky').<sup>1</sup> The work held up as an example in the pages of *Novy Lef* as literature of fact was not a work of the late 1920's but Shklovsky's *Sentimental Journey*, memoirs of the years 1917-20, written between 1919 and 1922 and published in 1923.<sup>2</sup> In fact, even in its first, 'heroic' period, Russian futurism did not just concentrate on expanding the verbal means of poetic expression, a tendency reaching its peak in the 'trans-sense' (*zaumy*) poetry of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, it also introduced a new poetic content drawn from non-literary speech and prose and from direct impressions of reality, best characterised by Elena Guro's prose poems. Many works incorporated both tendencies, for example, Kamensky's 'ferro-concrete' poems, whose syntax is replaced by the distribution of the words on the printed page (as in *Zang Tumb Tuum*), but the content is fleeting impressions of a place and time.<sup>3</sup>

Second, it is important to examine the politico-aesthetic situation in the USSR in the late 1920's more concretely, and not just to assume a growing pressure from the Party to conform to a pre-defined Marxist critical orthodoxy, socialist realism. It should be remembered that before 1917, there had been no Marxist aesthetics as such. Marx, Engels and Lenin wrote very little on aesthetic questions, and even Plekhanov only took over ideas from Hegel's aesthetics and opinions from liberal thinkers of his day. In general, European Social-Democracy tended to support 19th century realism (Balzac, Zola) as against the decadents and symbolists, the socially conscious artist against *l'art pour l'art*. In Russia this meant the civic tradition typified by Chernyshevsky and the criticism of Belinsky, Tolstoy, and among 20th century authors, Gorky. Hence there was an initial prejudice against the Russian avant-garde among the Bolsheviks, but this was offset by the avant-garde's more enthusiastic support for the October Revolution and their work during the Civil War. Hence in the 1920's there was no Marxist aesthetic theory to counterpose to Left Front art. This still had to be constructed.

After the October Revolution, although the Bolsheviks were well aware of the propagandistic importance of art (witness Lenin's famous decree on the replacement of monuments to reactionaries by monuments to progressives and revolutionaries), their general policy was one of welcoming all artists, whatever their aesthetic tendency, so long as they agreed to support Soviet power. Two groups of artists, however, demanded a Party-backed monopoly for their tendency: the futurists, on the grounds that their futurist revolution in the arts was the aesthetic complement of the Bolshevik revolution in politics; and the Proletkult, who proclaimed the need for a proletarian culture created by proletarians and condensing their experience to accompany the dictatorship

of the proletariat. These three trends reproduced themselves throughout the 1920's, despite apparent turns in the officially constituted bodies: (1) a broad-minded, but basically traditionalist line deriving from the socially conscious realism of the 19th century, (2) a line asserting the need for a specifically proletarian art and culture, and (3) a line deriving from and extending futurism. The excellence and seminal nature of the work of the third group often obscures from us today the fact that it was by far the smallest of the three. Besides these three left-wing art tendencies, there was, of course, the external and internal emigration, artists and writers whose work was consciously anti-Bolshevik, and groups such as the Serapion Brothers, who held that the artist should pursue artistic excellence independently of any political positions.

During the period of the first *Lef*, and while it was the most important proponent of the futurist trend, the traditionalist position was championed by the 'fat' magazine *Krasnaya Nov* (Red Virgin Soil), edited by the Communist A. K. Voronsky from 1921-7. Voronsky supported the so-called 'fellow-travelling' authors, writers who, while not Communist or proletarian, were sympathetic to the Soviet regime, and whose writing, while not particularly political or agitational, reflected the experiences of the Revolution and Civil War. Most important of these were Pilnyak and Esenin. At the same time, Voronsky turned to Plekhanov for the rudiments of a Marxist aesthetics, developing the idea that art has a cognitive function, encapsulating knowledge of historical development (otherwise only accessible in scientific abstraction) in concrete, typical, cases. In these positions he was opposed by the *On Guard* group, members of VAPP, the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, founded 1920 and dominated by proletarian poets and authors, ex-members of the Proletkult. The On-guardists demanded strict adherence to the Party's political line and an art whose function was emotional and agitational rather than cognitive, encouraging proletarians to political action by anecdotal, often factual accounts of their immediate political and economic tasks (echoes of this debate about cognition and emotion can be traced in the *Lef* and *Novy Lef* arguments).

In 1925, the Politbureau of the CPSU(B) made a direct decision in literary matters for the first time. While backing VAPP to a considerable extent (Voronsky was increasingly discredited by his association with the Trotskyite opposition), they demanded a much less sectarian outlook. The Association's magazine became *On Literary Guard*, and leadership shifted to a more moderate group centred around L. L. Averbakh, Y. N. Libedinsky and D. A. Furmanov (the author of *Chapaev*). While calling for a much more strict adherence to the Party line than Voronsky, and in particular, a proletarian position, they in fact adopted many of his theoretical theses. Their ideal author was Lev Tolstoy. On cognition and emotion they took a compromise: 'Cognition of life on the one hand

and emotional infection on the other are inextricably and immutably joined in a work of art' (Averbakh, 1927). Art reveals the causal connections behind concrete experience, it 'tears off the veils', but it does not do so by conscious abstraction, like science, but by the unconscious effects of a deeply felt world-view: 'Art does not operate by the same method as science; it does not deal in abstractions, as does philosophy, but through immediate impressions, it shows concrete phenomena in their interconnection, and this calls forth what is known as the 'aesthetic feeling' . . . In order to accomplish the generalising work of art one must possess a deeply felt philosophy (world-view). Only such a philosophy permits man to free his immediate impressions of reality from their place of concealment under the casing of philistine judgement' (Libedinsky, 1927). *On Literary Guard* attacked the Lef group's theory of 'social demand' as 'mechanistic' – art was not something provided by the technical specialist on proletarian demand, but a largely unconscious product of men in determinate social situations. And the characters represented in literary work should have these same properties, be psychologically realistic 'living men' and, in the ideal case (the positive hero), 'harmonious men'.

They were opposed by *Novy Lef*, but also by a heterogeneous group including the old *On Guard* leadership, who formed Litfront in 1928. They attacked the contemplative, objective aspect of RAPP realism (VAPP became RAPP in 1928), demanding a more agitational, emotional literature based on the revolutionary sketch, and characterised by 'revolutionary romanticism': 'The decisive thing in a work of art is not so much the author's conscious view of the world as the author's emotional reaction to the world'.

Thus *Novy Lef*'s 'factography' must be seen in a triangular debate with psychological realism and revolutionary romanticism. 'Socialist realism' was not really established until well after the dissolution of RAPP and the formation of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932, and it synthesised elements both of the psychological realism of the RAPPists and of the revolutionary romanticism of Litfront. However, at least in the first years of the USW, it laid much less stress on a proletarian component or a Party commitment than any of the left schools of the 1920's.<sup>4</sup>

The third qualification of the simple argument of political pressure is the international character of the demand for an art of fact. I have already referred to the example of Marinetti, but the parallels are most obvious in the German case. In Germany, the Communist Party helped organise a German equivalent of RAPP, the *Bund Proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers) with its organ *Die Linkskurve*. As was natural in a capitalist society, this organisation included a broader range of left artists than RAPP. It contained a traditionalist wing arguing for a psychologically realist aesthetic derived largely from Hegel, centred around Wittfogel and Lukács, and a proletarian

group (also influenced by German *Neue Sachlichkeit*) exemplified by Ernst Ottwalt, advocating positions with similarities both to Litfront (anecdotal literature with an agitational emphasis) and Lef (documentarism, use of extra-literary forms and material).<sup>5</sup> More important perhaps in comparison with the USSR are the dadaist artists who rallied to the revolutionary cause – John Heartfield, Wieland Herzfelde, George Grosz and Erwin Piscator. Starting from dadaist hostility to 'art' as an ideological veil for capitalism, they came in the 1920's to see 'art' as a technique by which to make propaganda and instruction for the proletarian cause effective, ie, they saw art as fulfilling a 'social demand'. Herzfelde and Grosz wrote in 1925:

If he does not want to be an idler, an antiquated dud, the contemporary artist can only choose between technology and propaganda in the class struggle. In either case, he must relinquish 'pure art'. Either by enrolling as an architect, an engineer or an advertising artist in the – unfortunately still highly feudalistically organised – army which develops the industrial forces and exploits the world, or by joining the ranks of the oppressed who are struggling for their fair share in the world's value, for a meaningful social organisation of life, as a recorder and critic reflecting the face of our time, as a propagandist and defender of the revolutionary idea and its supporters' (*Die Kunst ist in Gefahr*).<sup>6</sup>

Piscator's theatre similarly eschewed psychology and illusion in favour of propaganda and instruction (he expressed a similar hostility to Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* as Tretyakov did in *Novy Lef*).<sup>7</sup> Though the propaganda effect is stressed by these writers more than the fact as such, there are clear similarities here with the *Novy Lef* position. These similarities are partly related to the close links between the Russian and German avant-gardes on the one hand (Tretyakov was the link man in the literary debates in the late 1920's),<sup>8</sup> and between the CPSU(B) and the KPD on the other. But they are also rooted in the problems of avant-garde art itself and the political commitments of the artists, which themselves had sources close to their demand for an artistic revolution.

Thus the 'literature of fact' advocated by *Novy Lef* is not a desperate attempt to accommodate to increasing political pressure. Rather it is an attempt to get to grips with something which had been true of futurism from the beginning: that the art which had concentrated its revolution on the means of artistic production, expanding poetic language into trans-sense language, transforming poetic devices such as metaphor, had led both to a change in the content from traditional literary material to such extra-literary uses of language as letters, memoirs, diaries, newspapers and feuilletons,<sup>9</sup> and a change in the function of art with respect to politics and the dominant ideology. Exactly the same can be

64 seen in the German case. The manifesto *Die Kunst ist in Gefahr*, from which I have quoted, may seem a simple demand for propaganda art, the technique simply increasing the effects of the political line conveyed. However, the text itself is organised in a parodic form with semi-comic sub-heads, the title itself being ironic, and in it Grosz describes the extent to which his own art is derived from lavatory graffiti, a scatological reference which is echoed in Russian futurism by the use of obscure obscenities in the work of Kruchenykh and Zdanovich. Similarly, Piscator's elaborate mechanical staging and his epic style of acting were more than mere propaganda devices, and as developed by Brecht, created an entirely new theatrical art.

This is not to say that the theorists of *Novy Lef* solved the problems thus produced. Nevertheless, the reality of these problems is revealed in a number of confusions or paradoxes characteristic of the theoretical writing of the period. The most important of these is found in the use of the term 'objective'. Sometimes it implies that the work itself is the object, that it has no relationship to anything outside it, represents only itself and is therefore as abstract as possible (the 'word as such' of the futurists, the abstract art of the constructivists), sometimes that the work has a completely objective *aim*, a social and political function (the utilitarian objects produced by the productivists, the agitational art of Piscator and Eisenstein). These two definitions ought to be distinct, it ought to be possible to divide artists into constructivists and productivists – but the two obstinately overlap. A work is most objective when it is most formalised, but this objectivity is conceived in the double sense of most object-like in itself, and most adapted to an objective goal.

Perhaps the most serious attempt to theorise this paradox was Shklovsky's famous notion of *ostranenie* or 'making-it-strange'. Ordinary language and everyday perception rapidly become routinised with the result that real understanding and vision cease. It is the function of art, by linking together dissimilar things in tropes, and disappointing routine expectations in all its devices, to make us see and understand afresh, correctly. Thus the more formalised, the more 'true', the closer to 'reality'.<sup>10</sup> This idea is found in Vertov's *Lef* articles, too, for what characterises the cinema-eye is the *differences* between it and the human eye – hence the emphasis on close-up, unnatural perspective and slow and fast motion. But attractive as the idea is, it does not solve the problem, for the 'truth' or 'reality' the estrangement conveys remains completely ineffable, a momentary spark flashing between remote poles brought together by the artist, and the means used to achieve it can degenerate into a new Marinism, or even, as Tretyakov saw, into a decorative device. Nor did the Germans solve the related problem of their equation of technical revolution in art and revolution of the political tendency of art. The most advanced theorist of this

So far my discussion has concentrated on literary theory, with a few references to the visual arts. What about the cinema?<sup>12</sup> The stress on fact obviously indicated documentary, but this involved a change in the definition of *material*. Discussing literature, Tretyakov used this term in a way deriving both from Marx's definition of 'raw material' as material already the result of a certain initial labour of extraction, and from the formalist critics' conception of the relation between literary and extra-literary (but linguistic) 'series' (*ryad*): hence letters, memoirs, newspapers, etc. Where photography and the cinema were concerned, it clearly implied a marked hostility to fiction and illusion. All the futurists seem to have shared Brik's hostility to the 'fake Lenin' in Eisenstein's *October*: at a Sovkino meeting in 1927, Mayakovsky declared 'I promise you that at the most solemn moment, whenever it may be, I shall give this fake Lenin the bird and cover him with rotten eggs'.<sup>13</sup> This hostility to 'fakes' applied *a fortiori* to psychologically realistic acting. Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* (1926) was seen as a betrayal of his earlier 'bio-mechanical' style of acting and as a retreat to the ground of RAPP or even Voronsky. But on the other hand, it is possible to categorise a wide range of phenomena as factual material, from candid camera to certain kinds of artificial re-enactment. Hence the dispute about the 'play' versus the 'unplayed' film. Secondly, a stress on documentary raises the problem of the script. Once the fictional story has been rejected, what is to replace it? Arvatov and Brik favoured a script based on the properties of the object, the process to be represented in the film. Hence the latter attacked Vertov for what he saw as decorative constructivism, and Eisenstein for historical distortion and the use of metaphor, preferring Shub's historical documentaries to either.<sup>14</sup> As well as being hostile to the potential RAPPism of the 'fake Lenin', Brik suspected the 'Litfront' emphasis on agitprop in Eisenstein. Shklovsky, on the other hand, true to his principles, approved the metaphorical montage of *October*, stressing only the dangers of *conventional* uses of such metaphor and *conventional* distortions of historical fact.

These divergent critical opinions and divergent artistic methods (for Vertov and Eisenstein were members of the Left Front of the Arts, and therefore the colleagues of their critics) are thus not so disparate as they might seem, nor are they the last gasps of a heroic movement under intolerable political pressure. On the contrary, they are the record of the theoretical problems produced by the achievements of Russian futurism in literature, the visual arts and the cinema, and the responses of the futurist artists to the October Revolution. That they did not solve these problems is not surprising. If they are to be solved (and it is crucial that they should be now that the classical narrative cinema has come into

66 question again), these texts should be carefully and critically studied, not accepted as solutions, nor rejected as simply incoherent or as distorted by bureaucratic political intervention.

## References

1. A. A. Bogdanov: 'Critique of Proletarian Art', *Proletarskaya Kultura*, 1918 no 3, pp 12-21, German translation in Richard Lorenz ed, *Proletarische Kulturrevolution in Sowjetrussland*, Munich 1969, p 43.  
2. Translated by Richard Sheldon, Ithaca and London 1970.
3. For the 'heroic phase' of Russian futurism see Vladimir Markov: *Russian Futurism, a History*, London 1969.
4. See Edward J. Brown: *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature 1928-32*, New York 1953.
5. See Helga Gallas: *Marxistische Literaturtheorie, Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*, Neuwied and Berlin 1971.
6. *Manifeste, Schriften deutscher Künstler des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Bd.I, ed Diether Schmidt, Dresden 1965, p 358.
7. Erwin Piscator, *Political Theatre 1920-1966*, exhibition catalogue, London 1971, p 10.
8. Tretyakov visited Berlin in 1931, met Brecht and many leading members of the BPRS, and was attacked in *Die Linkskurve* by Lukács (see Gallas, op cit, pp 123-5). In the USSR, he was close to Piscator after the latter settled there in 1931.
9. A feuilleton is a regular column in a newspaper which makes a moral or political point about the day's news, usually by linking two unrelated news items together in some unexpected way – the conceit is as important as the overt point. Feuilletons are found in French papers and in papers modelled on French ones; in Russia they had a particularly spectacular development. Robert Escarpit's *Au jour le jour* column in *Le Monde* is a good example of a feuilleton. For an analysis of the technique of the feuilleton, see Viktor Shklovsky: *Gamburgsky Schéti*, Leningrad 1928.
10. See Victor Erlich: *Russian Formalism, History-Doctrine*, Paris and the Hague, 3rd edition 1969, pp 176-7.
11. Eg: 'It is a commonplace that political tendencies inhabit every work of art in every epoch, in that such tendencies are historical forms of consciousness. But just as deeper rock strata only come to light where they outcrop, so the deeper formation 'tendency' is only visible to the eye in the outcrop points of the history of art. . . . Technical revolutions are the outcrop points of the development of art where tendency always comes to the surface, is in some sense exposed. In every new technical revolution, the tendency changes as if of itself from a very hidden element to a manifest one,' *Die Literarische Welt* Jg3 (1927), No 11, p 7; cit. Helmut Lethen: *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-32, Studien zur Literatur des 'Weissen Sozialismus'*, Stuttgart 1970, p 130. For a general account of Benjamin's aesthetic positions, ibid, pp 127-139.
12. For the Russian cinema and Left Front influence on it, see Jay Leyda: *Kino*, London 1960, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 218-232, esp. No 220-221, May-June 1970 and 226-7 (Jan-Feb 1971).
13. See Angelo Maria Ripellino: *Majakovskij e il teatro russo d'avanguardia*, Turin 1959, p 260n.
14. Vertov's reply to this criticism is discussed by A. Fevralski in an article in *Iskusstvo Kino*, December 1965, published in French translation in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No 229, May-June 1971, pp 27-33.

From the outset Lef has worked on the problem of the social function of things produced by workers in art. The task is – to isolate from among the confusion of (often conscious) intentions, the real social purpose of an object, that is, the effect it produces; then to establish the methods and conditions which produce this effect most fully, and most economically in terms of forces and means.

In the five years of its existence, Lef's most notable results have been in two fields – literature and the fine arts (IZO).

To the easel painting, which supposedly functions as 'a mirror of reality' Lef opposes the photograph – a more accurate, rapid and objective means of fixing fact.

To the easel painting – claimed to be a permanent source of agit – Lef opposes the placard, which is topical, designed and adapted for the street, the newspaper and the demonstration, and which hits the emotions with the sureness of artillery fire.

In literature, to *belles-lettres* and the related claim to 'reflection' Lef opposes reportage – 'factography' – which breaks with literary art traditions and moves entirely into the field of publicism to serve the newspaper and the journal. This is what is meant by Lef prose which we are disseminating through various newspaper articles and publishing in exemplary extracts in the journal *New Lef.*

On the other hand, Lef continues to promote poetry which it places within a definite agit function, assigns clear tasks in publicism and coordinates with other newspaper material.

These are the two fields from which the Lef formula of art is developing. If fact is needed – old art is no use. Old art deforms fact – to grasp fact use new methods.

If stimulus and agit are needed – assemble all the appropriate material available, but bear in mind that agit divorced from a concrete aim to which it is directed, agit transformed into agit in general, a play on nerves, stimulation for its own sake, is agit aesthetics and operates in society like drugs or dangerous drink.

While major poetic forms such as, for instance, the narrative poem, may still be the subject of controversy within Lef from the standpoint of their functional expediency, there is no controversy over such forms as the feuilleton, the slogan and the pragmatically orientated agit-poem.

The fixing of fact and agit represent two basic functions. In considering these we must also consider the devices through which these functions can be realised.

The art product operates (chiefly) as either intellectualisation or emotionalisation. In fact these may well represent two functional axes in relation to which the old concepts 'epic' and 'lyric' are now crystallising. We consider that with increased precision of work in art, the former will gain ground at the expense of the latter. We are moving towards a time when the intellectual content of facts will give them agit effect far surpassing that of any emotionalised pressuring.

It can be assumed that the schema appropriate to the fine arts will apply equally to the cinema.

Film production is a field in which Lef has recently concentrated particular energy, establishing production practices, studying film making and constructing a theory of cinema.

In this field theoretical research is in full swing. On questions of cinema the unarmed (or indeed those armed by Lef-Eaters) may see only anarchy of opinions in Lef theory and an apparent absence of any structuring constants. This is not the case.

When Lef theorists analyse formal and material distinctions between the 'play' film and the 'unplayed' film, Tretyakov proceeds from the film material, Shklovsky from the narrative structure of the scenario, Zhemchuzhny from the shooting arrangements, and so on, hence the apparent variations.

But when the question is the social function of these two categories, then Lef's orientation emerges immediately and clearly: on the one hand towards the cinema of fact — the news-reel in the widest sense of the term — and on the other hand to the pragmatically orientated, topical, publicistic agit-film.

At the same time it must be stressed that Lef in no sense equates the cinema of fact with cheap cinema, as does Comrade Blyakhin (*Izvestiya* 25.12.27) in an article which expresses views of the 'unplayed' film generally in accord with those of Lef.

The cinema of fact, if it is not to be discredited by amateurishness, hackwork and dullness, demands at least an equal place with the play film in estimates in terms of facilities and finance.

As far as the remaining mass of so-called 'entertainment' film production is concerned, the agit function of which is dubious since it lacks either actuality, or publicism, or pragmatic orientation, it is the business of Lef to sort out cinematic publicism from among the cinematic *belles-lettres*.

The Lef analysis of the social function of film genres and the related struggle for and against them is the main content of Lef work now and in the future.

We Raise the Alarm,  
S. Tretyakov (*New Lef* No 2, 1927)

The Civil War was also a period of fierce struggle on the art front. The revolutionary Futurists and Com-Futs were not just a detach-

ment of anti-traditionalists rushing in to conquer the tastes of the period. They flung art into the thick of revolutionary activity. They set the tone and held the hegemony in the field of aesthetic forms. Their innovations and projects, while not always fully realised, were always significant and grandiose. Tatlin's Tower, Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe*<sup>1</sup>, the Rosta Posters and the RSFSR productions and in common ideas of the epoch as important and inspiring as those that give rise to the worker's army and communist Saturday labour. The greatest achievement of left art in that period was the establishment of the principle of production art, whereby the former entertainer/joker/clown/conjurer/hanger-on of society's entertainment world switched categorically to the ranks of the workers, exchanging an aesthetic fantasy for the creation of things that were useful and needed by the proletariat.

Lef was the form which the activities of revolutionary Futurism took in the conditions of the New Economic Policy – an association of workers in left art. Lef means Left front, and Left front implies opposition to any other front. The novelty of the Lef position as against the position of Com-Fut lay in the fact that the principles established in the preceding period now had to be realised in conditions of competitive production with other group suppliers of aesthetic products. 'Who's side are you on?' proved to be an urgent question in the field of art too. The whole of academy art ranged itself against Lef. Academy art was economically powerful for it had once again found its old, well-tried consumer. It demanded a licence to trade and this was obligingly granted in the shape of the formula about 'assuming the cultural heritage'.

'Who's side are you on?' – a frenetic rag fair had broken out in the marketplace of aesthetic products where talent, charlatany and all kinds of fine imitations elbowed each other furiously. Their guidelines were the box office takings and production costs, their aims, to satisfy the tastes of the consumer. They lost no time in disassociating themselves from 'Lefism' even while appropriating Lef formal devices for their own constructivist nicknacks. But Lef proved to have staying power and vitality. Wherever artistic initiative was needed. Lef emerged and acted, to each piece of expediency on the part of academism, Lef raised its own utilitarian-based objection. But since Lef considered that an aggressive stance was vital, it had at all costs to maintain a distance between itself and its enemies: failing this it would have found itself thrust into the general melee where it would have had its arms pinned and been paralysed. As it was, the roach that crept up from the right wing of art did in fact paralyse Lef to a significant extent by taking over all its inventions, terminology, techniques, constructivist devices, parading itself in Lef colours to the point where the inexperienced eye would have been hard put to dis-

70 tinguish where a wooden construction was a construction and where a postcard with an inscription, where verse was a controlled organisation of language, and where simply musty lyricism.

'Who's side are you on?' was transformed into 'anything goes, with anyone, and anywhere', and embraces all-round. Instead of a struggle there came the sermon which preached inter-departmental agreement in the bosom of a single 'Soviet' art. Ideological differences in art were annulled – everything was reduced to a question of formal and technical differences. A band of all-embracing associations arose, flying the 'red' 'Revolutionary', 'Soviet', banner.

*New Lef* had not come into existence by chance, and the bearers of the innovative initiative could not accept this 'peace and goodwill to all departments' as appropriate soil for the blossoming of a Soviet art which would 'strike awe in the hearts of our enemies in the remaining five sixths of the world', as certain admirable and responsible comrades like to put it.

Drawing the teeth of natural enemies in the art field can lead to only one thing – they all end up toothless. The greatest sin for a worker in the art field now is not lack of talent or inventiveness, but on the contrary, principles. Note that when a Lef artist is asked to work in cinema he is told firmly, 'We're asking you as a specialist, not as a Lefist'. Translated this means 'give us first class subtitles for any old film we care to pass you but have the goodness to keep your nose out of the opinions and intentions of the cinema authorities who are floating on clouds of "satisfaction" for the philistine and diverting film production from its cultural role to the manufacture of aesthetic hashish'. A general levelling always has a soothing effect on the bureaucratic heart. Try to prove that when he wrote *War and the Universe* – a profoundly revolutionary, international and anti-war work – the lumpen-intellectual Mayakovsky actually wrote something quite decadent. That's a difficult thing to prove isn't it? – As difficult as perjury. What a difference it makes when poets are firmly divided into groups neatly corresponding to the class categories of a basic course in political studies: proletariat=VAPP, peasantry=Union of Peasant Writers, bourgeoisie=Union of Writers. But for this classification it would be clear to everyone that the nadsonian lyrics of say someone like Vyatich with his absolute indifference to mastering even the rudiments of verse writing – was essentially an anti-cultural and aesthetically conservative phenomenon whose effect must be the lowering of quality. But given the existence of the Union, the system of indicators is stood on its head: Vyatich equals peasant poet, therefore what he writes is characteristic of and necessary to the countryside, therefore Gosizdat publishes.

The first fact against which Lef must take a stand is this replacement of intergroup wars of principles by a levelling of all

The battle for form has been reduced to a battle for the stylistic sign. New inventions in the field of form are no longer weapons for cultural advance, but merely a new ornament, a new embellishing device, a new addition to the assortment of aesthetic embroideries and rattles offered to the public. Those who assemble these rattles of course bring them out wrapped in the padding of statement about 'social command', 'social need', 'reflections of revolutionary construction'. Who's going to strain his head and his patience over questions of form when it is not by the sign of quality that a product breaks into wide publication. In the field of form, the stereotype reigns supreme, but even the stereotype is mis-used. Remember Tugendkhold's ecstasies over the 'godpainters' who put an archangel's headdress adorned with a five-point star on the Red Army man and painted his face so that the religio-mystical effect to which icon painting forms are directed completely swallowed up our own in no sense religious or mystical conception of the Red Army man. The subjection of material to inappropriate formal means can only lead to the distortion of the splendid material offered by Soviet reality.

Soviet reality fixed by the lens of a Soviet camera (even in the form of a painted photograph if the preservation of a colour impression is called for) which finds a place in the pages of an illustrated journal is as important and essential as daily bread. But the same material hanging on the walls of an AkhRR (see biographical notes and acronyms p 91) exhibition in the form of an easel painting – which for all its sympathies in this direction the AkhRR hasn't an idea where to put or how to use – is material fixed by the outworn devices of a transplant art and therefore material ruined.

'Red' icon painting devices lend themselves to this kind of distortion of material (proud, fiery-eyed leaders, selfless marching pioneers, peasant Ivans with their heraldic sickles): All of this is a feature of the agit-poster, against which if I am not mistaken, the AkhRR is waging a battle, but whose devices they seem to be attempting to adapt to their own needs. I won't even discuss the notorious instances of distortion which occur when a painter armed with a camera goes for a stroll, shoots his material, and then proceeds to smear the honest and accurate photograph with all sorts of 'personally significant' but absolutely inaccurate daubs of colour.

Our cinema is also a field where material is ruined, and precisely in areas where room was given to the creators of cinematic stereotypes and their activities. Thus unskilled hands have completely ruined the splendid material presented by the Civil War and the history of the Revolution. *Battleship Potemkin*<sup>3</sup> rehabilitated this material at a moment when the term 'civil war film' had been

finally discredited in the film studios. Our Near East was ruined in the same sort of way: the model structure for all kinds of exoticism which is a feature of the imperialist's colonial novel was adapted where a new, original, Soviet, operative approach to the life of underdeveloped peoples should have been found.

It is a fact that once the concern with form lessened, what remained was the line of least resistance, the reactivation of already worn-out formal models and the rejection of innovations in form. The persistant cry of the 'saviours of art' against so-called stunts and conjuring tricks has led to a situation where they are now credited with the defence of either the crudely talentless, or of the good old stereotype.

The first mistake of these 'saviours' was their endorsement of the formula form/content, 'what /' how' (rather than Lef's proposed 'material-purpose-form/thing') and in the activation of each part separately. The second mistake, the forced pedalling of the 'primacy of content' (i.e. of a completely indeterminate and undifferentiated phenomenon) was in fact realised in a deterioration in form. The 'how' flew up the chimney. Surely 'how' has its own noun - 'quality' [the Russian *kak-kachestvo* (how-'howness')] permits this pun on the part of the writer] and the struggle for how/quality is the struggle for form. The struggle for quality in art has now been replaced by a struggle for the reinstatement of the pre-war stereotype, what has happened is a flight backwards into the wilderness.

The fall of interest in the constructivist schema, in innovation by mastercraftsmen, cannot be disputed. Where five years ago people went to the productions of the 'October of the theatre' to see a director's work whatever the play, they now go to see a play irrespective of how and by what theatre it is produced. What is appropriate for our day is an orientation towards the material, a focus on material in its most raw form - the memoir, the diary, sketch, article, outline. But the artist/cooks of the day turn up their noses at such low, topical, journalistic forms and go on nailing up living material in the stereotype coffins of tales and romances.

The fall of interest in form is equally the tragedy of today's poets since verse is precisely that verbal construct in which the formal elements are underlined.

Material in raw forms - this is the vanguard of contemporary art. But raw forms can only serve an informational purpose and this is the tragedy of the situation - as soon as the question of the use of material on levels other than that of pure information arises, say in agit - pre-war formal devices immediately appear on the scene and thanks to them the material is either deformed as we have seen, or is immediately subjected to the aims of aesthetic diversion from reality and its task of construction.

But the pre-war norm has its defenders:

Why should art be concerned with raising quality and seeking new forms when the basic mass of consumers of aesthetic products swallow them in the pre-war models and even praise them. Down with innovation; down with experiment; long live the aesthetic inertia of the masses.

There is only one context in which the public can honestly be fed the pre-war aesthetic norm: when what is intended is the pre-war norm's corresponding social purpose – to draw the consciousness and emotions of the consumer away from the essential tasks of reality. And this is the point we have reached. The pre-war norm in form has drawn after it the pre-war norm in ideology: art as relaxation, art as pleasant stimulus, art as diversion . . . is this not a variation on the old 'art as dream, day-dream, fantasy'? The day dream has in fact been given full reign, such sugary day dream that it's even nauseated comrade Bukharin, and he's such a busy man!

The cry 'down with agit-art' is already old hat, 'long live reflection' already has a hollow ring. The latest cry of the 'back to the past' brigade is 'down with topicality! Volkenstein praises Meyerhold's *The Government Inspector*<sup>5</sup> for its retreat from topicality and transforms his praise into a motto.

A full stop has been reached. The pre-war norm has been achieved. The altar of art has resurged out of the tedious abysses of our 'depressing, grey, everyday reality' to provide citizens with a legalised daily escape route into the kingdom of dream/stereotypes. Topical raw material still survives, but never mind. Volkenstein will deal with that too. The specialists will invent a means of getting imaginative exoticism from Party history material, or treat it in say, ancient Roman or Babylonian tones, or even in the Sergievo-suburbs-iconpainting style<sup>6</sup> and everyone will feel that art is serving revolutionary construction (well of course, look at the themes, incidents, characters) while in reality art will be serving a philistine escapism from the revolution.

These are the four dangers:

levelling

lowering of form

pre-war stereotypes

art as a drug

Lef is aware and will fight responsibly

for an aggressive, class-active art

for innovation appropriate to the tasks of socialist construction

for art/lifebuilding, art/activisor, art/agit

Present: O. Brik, V. Zhemchuzhny, A. Lavinsky, M. Machavaryani, P. Neznamov, V. Pertsov, S. Tretyakov, E. Shub, V. Shklovsky, L. Esakia, and others.

*Tretyakov*

Nowhere is Lef working more intensively than in the cinema. Yet lately we have been criticised for not practising what we preach: it's been said that Lef theory can sometimes be diametrically opposed to the work it is doing in the production sphere. This is the first question we need to confront.

We need to define our work in terms of what we reject, what we consider arbitrary and what we believe needs to be argued in words and action. Lef does have a general line, but the weight of work at the level of production has meant that it has been only partially articulated – it needs to be made explicit.

The second question concerns the basic problem of contemporary cinema – the 'play' film/'unplayed' film controversy. This requires a theoretical analysis to clarify distinctions and oppositions. Perhaps the actual 'play' film/'unplayed' film opposition is itself an unfortunate formulation of the problem.

There have been attempts to establish the degree of 'play' involved at the various stages of film production. The element of 'play' is the random personal factor which may be introduced by the director, the scenario writer, or the actor, and it is this element which determines the degree of 'play' in a given film sequence. . . .

It has never been my view that Lef should be concerned with the documentary exclusively – this would be rather one-sided. I have always felt that there is every justification for the fact that the Lef cover bears two names: Eisenstein and Vertov. These two men are working with precisely the same apparatus, but with two different methods. With Eisenstein the agitational aspect predominates and the film material is subordinated to this function. With Vertov it is the informational aspect which predominates with the stress on the material itself.

But can Vertov's work be called pure documentary? Pure documentary is the editing of facts simply in terms of their actuality and social significance. When a fact becomes a brick in a construction of a different kind – the pure documentary concept disappears; everything depends on the montage.

Whether or not a film is a 'play' film or an 'unplayed' film to my mind is a question of the degree of deformation of the material out of which the film is composed: the random personal factor in any given film. 'Interpretation' is from the start a one-

sided exploitation of the material. I would for instance call the film *The Great Road*<sup>7</sup> a 'play' film, but a film 'played' by a single character, Esfir Ilisnna Shub. The personal factor in her case is artistic, her selection of material purely aesthetic, directed towards achieving a certain emotional charge in the auditorium through the arrangement of montage attractions. But Shub is here dealing with material of a certain cultural level which has been minimally deformed.

The reaction of a viewer who said with feeling after watching Shub's *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*<sup>8</sup>: 'It's a pity there are those gaps, they should have been scripted in', was not such a stupid one. This man valued not the authenticity of the material, but the effect the film had on him on the strength of which he asked for the blanks to be filled in by inauthentic material. . . . I think that in order to distinguish between the 'play' film and the 'unplayed' film (the terminology is arbitrary) one must have in mind the scale of deformation in the elements from which the film is composed. By deformation I mean the arbitrary distortion and displacement of 'raw' elements.

Such deformation operates first of all on the level of the material (from the moment the question 'What is to be filmed?' is asked and a selection made of the material required from the total mass of material available). Secondly, the deformation of material occurs with the selection of camera position, the arrangement of lighting, and thirdly, at the stage of montage, through the director.

Measured against such a deformation scale, the material falls into three categories: *in flagrante*, scripted, and 'played'. The first category covers material caught red-handed, Vertov's 'life slap-up'. Here deformation is minimal, but it nevertheless has its own scale since it is possible, for instance, to film a subject without his being aware of being filmed. . . . I have for example discussed with Shub the possibility of walling cameras up in the street to film passersby. . . . This would produce shots of the typical in which the personal element in choice of camera position had been eliminated.

When a cameraman films, he inevitably introduces something individual into his work. This is not problematic if he proceeds from certain premises: natural lighting, calculated sharpness in focus, a preliminary working out of relationships between groups, etc. But we should take a stand against randomness in the cameraman's selection of camera position. Why should a cameraman dance around his subject? The usual explanation is that in this way the subject is shown from all sides. But there is surely a distinction between the position necessary for the fullest representation of the object, and an arbitrary aesthetic 'contemplation' of the object from all sides.

The material '*in flagrante*' of the first category is therefore the most objective. The next degree along the deformation scale

represents the slightly more impure '*in flagrante*' material which results when the presence of a camera affects the behaviour of the subject being filmed. He sees the handle turning and his movements become artificial, he begins to give a distorted version of himself, to present himself as an icon rather than as you want to see him.

The third degree along the scale in this category is the filming of life '*in flagrante*', but using artificial lighting; for instance the filming of a peasant family in natural conditions, in a dark hut, when the natural lighting is changed by the positioning of lights in various corners of the room.

The second category, which I have labelled 'scripted' material, I will illustrate with the following example. I film a woodcutter at work; I bring him to a tree selected by me, and ask him to chop it down while I film. His work is being done to order, but I have set in motion his professional habits and therefore the deformation involved is minimal. This is in fact a description of the way work with the actor-model operates; he is selected as material which corresponds in its concrete qualities, habits and reflex actions to the image required on the screen. This is how Eisenstein works – he chooses people with the appropriate faces, habits and movements. There is of course an undoubted orientation towards play in this structure but to a far lesser degree than with the professional actor. The 'free' personal element introduced by the actor is here replaced by the authentic action of a correctly selected reflex. . . .

The task of the director of the 'unplayed' film is to get as close as possible to the 'raw', to material 'slap-up'. For us in Lef it is important to delimit the practical possibilities in relation to the dictates of social command and thus to establish the limit towards which our concrete daily work must be directed. This is why, in setting up our maximum-programme we demand: give us 'Kino-eye' and 'life slap-up', etc.

But insofar as there is a need for emotional stimulus, we work with the montage of attractions method, insofar as our hands must be free to affect the viewer, we will also need to concern ourselves with material of another kind: we may perhaps also need to defend scripted material, that is, to work with the methods of Eisenstein.

And now for a word or two about depersonalised material.

The documentary needs clear indication that the image on the screen represents a particular man at a particular moment in a particular place, doing something specific. The loss of this 'specificity' of the image generalises the object and the viewer observes it as a depersonalised and 'type' representation.

Example: barge haulers towing a barge, the usual colour combinations are: barge haulers, ropes and barge, grey. The cameraman, waits for a ray of light, then shoots an effective shot but does not however convey that this represents barge haulers taken

at a moment of visually effective lighting. The viewer therefore receives an impression of barge haulers which is exceptional, not typical.

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Finally, the film direction. There is on the one hand the director-cameraman who looks for the typical shot and natural lighting, without forcing the material. And then there is the 'play' director who sees himself as the sole master and interpreter of the material. He usually justifies his random free personal interpretation of material on the basis of intuitions: the director who is at once a specialist and a publicist is rare. Most often the director will tell you: 'That's how it seemed to me, that's what I felt'. He has a visual taste approach to the evaluation of a film which is personal to him.

And so it seems to me that the apparently sharp demarcation line between the 'play' film and the 'unplayed' film is in fact extremely relative.

The question of 'play' film as against 'unplayed' film is the question of respect for fact as against fiction, for contemporaneity as against the past.

### *Shklovsky*

The point is that there are some extremely useless clever people about and some extremely useful mistakes. Talking to the documentary film-makers, I find it is relatively easy to break them down, but the mistakes they are making are extremely useful in terms of both art and cinema: they are the mistakes that lead to innovation.

The distinction between 'play' and 'unplayed' film is an elementary one of course, but there is nothing to be gained from hammering something we haven't understood: the material itself is always intelligent, if we haven't been able to analyse certain distinctions within it, the fault is with our analysis and not with the material.

It's been suggested here that Kuleshov and Eisenstein are the 'play' film, while Shub and Vertov are the 'unplayed'. But they all sat in the same company, Shub learnt her montage on the 'play' film, while the play film director studied montage on the documentary.

It's a very old problem: Goethe once said - 'You sit right opposite a tree, draw it as carefully as you can, and what becomes of that tree on paper?'

It's the same with a camera. Certain problems are not easy to solve by the laws of physics: whether to have a fixed camera position, or whether the cameraman should move round a 'play' actor or the actor around the 'unplayed' cameraman. The problem is raised from the very beginning, by the way a shot is set up, which already involves an element of 'play' . . .

The best moments in Shub's film are the sequences which show Dybenko — he has no idea how to face a camera and wavers between smiles and putting on a heroic face. And this piece of 'play' with the cameraman constitutes a moment of genius in this excellent film.

I've watched VIP's being filmed and they could be signed up in the artist's union right away. The camera no sooner starts to roll than they're there in the frame, they've taken up their positions and launched into conversation with each other.

Obviously the 'play'/'unplayed' division itself is at fault because it generates a general law.

What Shub is doing and Vertov is getting ready to do has many analogies in literature. For instance, Tolstoy: he is almost entirely an 'unplayed' writer since he takes three or four pages of historical material and it's enough for him to change a word to transform it into literature. . . . And Brik recently showed me a parody on Dostoevsky where he writes: 'you still haven't had my last final chapter of *Crime and Punishment* so take some court case and substitute Raskolnikov for the name of the accused — I haven't had time to write it'.

The play side of art shouldn't be exaggerated. The phenomenon of 'play' is inherent in art, but art itself periodically reorientates itself towards the material.

And in this respect the erring documentary film makers were correct and are correct now in that they rightly bring forward the material. The consequence is that the material takes priority. For today.

For this reason I consider that for all the complexity and controversial nature of the 'play'/'unplayed' question, the problem is not one of who is doing the seeing or revealing, or how he sees or reveals, but how to assess the degree of usefulness and depth achieved.

Lef is faced with a task that is more extensive than the problem of the 'play' film as against the 'unplayed' film, and that is the question of the priority of the material.

Curiously enough Rabis has just recently distributed us with a draft of its writer's agreement which contains, among other things, one very odd item. This item lays down how many hours are required for the writing of a scenario. The agreement reckons on 75 hours and an hourly rate of pay.

Karl Marx wrote that everything could be translated into hours except writing: Marx's work was written a long time ago and was of course based on the material. But this is far from the mind of Rabis.

Let's take the formula for the composition of a work: some people have the very strange idea that the starting point is a narrative structure which is then filled out by material. The Lef idea is that a man begins by studying the material, only then does

the question of how that material is to be formulated arise.

There are moreover both narrative and non-narrative representations of reality; non-narrative cinema is nevertheless thematic. . . .

What practical suggestions do I have? Firstly – instead of the division into film documentary and 'play' film, a division between narrative and non-narrative cinema.

A certain Bragin suggested that a film was needed on the subject of corn, and then himself proceeded to squeeze in a love theme. There's been a lot of talk about rye lately and how it's being exported to London now. Well corn and love make a fine pair and should be packed off to London too – there's no sense in them.

Saltykov-Schedrin once made the point that you could only introduce family events into the framework of a family novel. Our main tragedy today is that we have a soviet empire style afflicted with restorationist themes. When a form has been misapplied but persists for a number of decades it is universalised. And so the inevitable love theme is being pushed into everything. . . .

Our misfortune and error is not just that we don't know how to distinguish between the 'play' film and the 'unplayed' film but that within the organisation of cinema we don't always know how to defend the material and begin our work on material which has no merit from an artistic point of view. . . .

### *Shub*

The whole problem can be reduced to the question of what it is we should be filming today. When this has been resolved, the terminology – 'play' or 'unplayed' – will be unimportant. The essential fact is that we are Lef.

Lef believes that only the filming of the documentary is relevant for our times, in order to preserve our epoch for future generations, just that. This means that we want to film today's times, today's people, today's events. Whether Rykov or Lenin 'play' badly or well in front of the camera, and whether or not this represents a moment of play are questions which do not disturb us. The important thing is that the camera is filming both Lenin and Dybenko, even if they don't know how to present themselves to the camera, since this feature is most characteristic of them.

Why does Dybenko come across to us in such a non-abstract way on the screen? Precisely because this is Dybenko himself, and not someone portraying Dybenko. The fact that an element of 'play' is involved doesn't trouble us. . . . Everything is a question of technique and when we have good lighting equipment, and the technical apparatus for mounting a shot properly, the element of play will begin to disappear.

What we need to fight for now is not the documentary – this is being stressed all around us in the newspapers and by people every-

80 where. We don't have to argue for the documentary anymore, our work is a better argument than any article. What is important now is the fight for the conditions which make work of quality possible. We have gathered the material, and the skills we will master with time.

Where does the idea come from that we are not interested in making emotionally effective films? The point is that our concern is with the material and with questions of the kind of material we want to work with.

Have we denied the importance of the element of skill? Not at all. We believe that a high degree of skill can produce a film composed of 'unplayed' material which will surpass any art film. But everything depends on the technical possibilities available and on the method, and this is what we should be discussing.

#### Film Platform (*New Lef* No 3, 1928)

*Since he was unable to attend the Lef debate, Comrade Arvatov has sent us his contribution which we publish below.*

*Arvatov*

*New Lef* No 11/12 of 1927 contained a report of an interesting debate on what constitutes Lef cinema, i.e. left cinema, i.e. obviously, production cinema, understanding under this term the socio-technical utilisation of art.

The conclusions reached were not unanimous, but there was enough of a consensus for the following to emerge: Lef theory considers cinema of the right to be characterised by 'play', narrative-structure (*fabula*) and deformation of the object, while a film of the left is 'unplayed', non-narrative and does not deform the object.

Firstly, a few words on the misunderstanding of the concept of narrative structure.

The term is used to describe the succession of events which makes up the theme (*syuzhet*) of an art product. Bourgeois art tradition has taught us to consider that narrative structure belongs to the realm of imagination (the tale, the story, etc) but any fact out of reality developed in time obviously has a narrative structure – it would be doctrinaire for instance to deny the existence of a narrative structure in the film *Petroleum*, and this is not something to be regretted. On the contrary, the narrative structure is possibly one of the main factors in aesthetic expression – to reject it would be to deprive revolutionary art of one of the powerful advantages of art in general.

This problem is tightly bound up with the problem of 'deformation' and the problem of so-called agit-art. The view was expressed at the Lef debate — and no particular objections were raised — that Lef theory defends two types of artistic activity: agit-art (agit-verse, the living paper, the placard, etc) and art-organiser of reality (industrial art, the feuilleton, the demonstration, etc), and consequently, the agit-film and the documentary; it was suggested that while the agit-film was to a large extent obliged to resort to 'play' and to the deformation of the subject, the less there was of these two elements, the closer the film approached the category of Lef and production art. However, the absence of 'play', of 'acting', and so on, in a film cannot guarantee its correspondence to the tasks of the proletarian art movement as they are formulated in production art theory. If this were not so, then the best proletarian film makers would be the authors of the so-called abstract German expressionist films and the French *Pathé-journal*. The term 'unplayed' describes a negative characteristic and is therefore inadequate.

#### *On relations to the film object*

It was fairly energetically argued at the debate that the only genuine Lef cinema was that in which the object was, so to speak, caught red-handed, when life 'slap up', to use Vertov's expression, is screened, when there has been no preliminary preparation of the 'real' represented. Such a view is pure sectarianism.

Let us suppose that you needed to show the complex process of wood manufacture. What would be the result of a 'life slap up' treatment? Aesthetic impressionism, the nonsense of a Picasso collage. From the standpoint of the 'life slap up' group, the demonstration of water synthesis at a chemistry lecture is pure theatricality since the good demonstration is not only prepared, but often rehearsed. . . .

The point that needs to be made is that the problem of the film object is wider and more complex than emerged from its treatment at the above-mentioned debate. The misfortune of our cinema revolutionaries is their ill-concealed aesthetic fetishism. When our film-maker comrades bellow against the 'copiers' and cheer for the 'real', for material as it is, they are implanting on society a new and superfluous aestheticism, they are inculcating the savouring of a 'real' peasant like a 'real' Cezanne, of a 'piece' of reality like a 'piece' of fine art, of stunning foreshortened perspective in film like someone or other's 'daring perspective' in representational easel painting or sculpture.

Today's obsession with composition and the image is profoundly formalist, almost on a par with the films of Protazanov and others. More than that — there is at the moment a widespread 'adulation'

82 of the usefulness of an object to the point where usefulness becomes not an aesthetic but an aesthetised category. There are productionists who are convinced that the aesthetic sense of the usefulness of a railway bridge can be absorbed through contemplation analogous to the contemplation of an easel painting representing a bridge. The idea that an aesthetic sense of the useful can only be reached through the use of an object, through utilisation, is foreign to them.

### *Sociology has the floor*

Firstly a few words about the agit film. Recently the papers told us of how a bourgeois film from the 'period of the Soviet Revolution' through shots of the 'expropriation of the exploiters' provoked a revolutionary demonstration in some Italian town. The film was anti-Soviet. Let's take another example. The first revolutionary production of the Soviet cinema, *Battleship Potemkin*, is at the moment making a triumphant tour of bourgeois Europe applauded by audiences which are far from exclusively proletarian. How are we to explain this? By the fact that Eisenstein is, apart from anything else, a revolutionary film-maker and a highly qualified master-craftsman in his field. And further, *Battleship Potemkin* has in essence remained, and still remains, within the bounds of ordinary aesthetic cinema.

These two facts are to be explained as follows: the social and class distinctions which characterise an art product are not to be sought intrinsically within the art product itself — they are extrinsic to it and located in the methods of production and consumption.

The fundamental form produced by bourgeois art was the easel painting. The easel painting is characterised by its autonomy, it is produced independently of the extra-aesthetic branches of human activity and is demanded independently of them. The essence of bourgeois cinema is in the existence of the network of film theatres which gather together film audiences.

Seen from this point of view, the distinction in terms of 'play' and 'unplayed' film — *The Thief of Bagdad*<sup>9</sup> as against *A Sixth of the World*<sup>10</sup> cannot be considered definitive. Both films are watched for the film itself, as an art product, not as a production of the cinema. Therefore the documentary, insofar as it fails to emerge from the cinema halls, remains a moving picture (*kinokartina*), not a newsreel (*kinogazeta*): and even the travel film and the contemporary scientific or technical film, etc bear the stamp of bourgeois art cinema as well as utilitarianism, as is evident from the fact that a cinema can screen *Petroleum* one week, *In the Jungles of Africa* the second, and *Red Army Manoeuvres* the third — a dubious brand of utilitarianism this. Without denying the inevitability of many transitional forms, I would suggest that if they

are to distinguish themselves from the 'also-lefs', consistent production artists are obliged to have their maximum-programme constantly in mind, making this their point of departure each time the need to place an artistic phenomenon arises.

For cinema the programme is:

1. The film must become a formal technical weapon in daily social construction, not on the level of its ideological interpretation, but in its socio-practical application (film in secondary schools, in universities, research institutes, etc).

2. We must cut down the network of cinemas, take an aggressive stand against the autonomous culture film and agitate for production cinematography in the appropriate 'unititarian' organisations and for the creation of cinema departments within them.

3. The slogan for 'film fixation of fact' must be replaced by slogans for film study, film teaching, film propaganda, film information, etc, and for the training that will transform today's film aesthetes into cadres of future film-makers (not in order to destroy art as some comrades claim, but in order to socialise its function).

### The Lef Arena

Comrades: Fight out your ideas!

Theme: *The Eleventh*, Dziga Vertov<sup>11</sup>

*October*,<sup>12</sup> Sergei Eisenstein and Grigory Alexandrov.

In the arena: O. Brik, V. Shklovsky

### *The Eleventh*

Dziga Vertov's film *The Eleventh* is an important frontline event in the struggle for the 'unplayed' film: its pluses and minuses are of equal significance and interest.

The film consists of a montage of 'unplayed' film material shot in the Ukraine. Purely in terms of camerawork, Kaufman's filming is brilliant, but on the level of montage the film lacks unity. Why?

Primarily because Vertov has ignored the need for an exact clearly-constructed thematic scenario. Vertov's thoughtless rejection of the necessity for a scenario in the 'unplayed' film is a serious mistake. A scenario is even more important for the 'unplayed' film than for the 'play' film where the term is understood not simply as a narrative-structured exposition of events, but rather as the motivation of the film material. The need for such motivation is even greater in the 'unplayed' film than in the 'play' film. To imagine that documentary shots joined without any inner thematic link can produce a film is worse than thoughtless.

Vertov tries to make the film titles do the work of a scenario but this attempt to use written language as a means of providing the cinematic image with a semantic structure can lead nowhere. A semantic structure cannot be imposed on the film from outside, it exists within the frame and no written additions can compensate for its absence. The reverse is also true, when a determined semantic structure is contained within the frame, it should not be exchanged for written titles.

Vertov has chosen particular film shots from a complete film sequence and joined them to other frames from a different sequence, linking the material under a general title which he intends will merge the different systems of meaning to produce a new system. What happens in fact is that these two sections are drawn back into their basic film parts and the title hovers over them without uniting them in any sense.

*The Eleventh* contains a long sequence on work in coal mines which has its own semantic structure, and another sequence showing work in a metallurgical plant which also has its own, distinct, semantic structure.

Vertov has joined a few metres from each sequence, intercutting the title 'Forward to Socialism'. The audience, watching the coal mining shots registers the system of meaning of this complete sequence, sees the metallurgical shots and registers this sequence, and no association with the new theme 'Forward to Socialism' is provoked. For this to be achieved new film material is essential....

This fact needs to be firmly established – the further development of the 'unplayed' film is being impeded at the moment by its workers' indifference to the scenario and the need for a preliminary thematic structuring of the overall plan. This is why the 'unplayed' film at present has a tendency to dissolve into separate film parts inadequately held together by heroic inscriptions.

It is curious that Shub's *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, put together out of old film strips, makes a far more total impression, thanks to careful structuring on the levels of themes and montage.

The absence of a thematic plan must inevitably affect the cameraman. For all the brilliance of Kaufman's filming, his shots never go beyond the visual illustration, they are filmed purely for their visual interest and could almost be included in any film. The reportage/publicism element is completely lacking and what emerges is essentially beautiful 'natural' shots, 'unplayed' images for a 'play' film.

This is because Kaufman did not know what theme he was filming for, from what semantic position those shots were to be taken. He filmed things as they seemed most interesting to him as a cameraman; his taste and skill are undeniable, but his material is filmed from an aesthetic, not a documentary, position.

Sergei Eisenstein has slipped into a difficult and absurd situation. He has suddenly found himself proclaimed a world-class director, a genius, he has been heaped with political and artistic decorations, all of which has effectively bound his creative initiative hand and foot.

In normal circumstances he could have carried on his artistic experiments and researches into new methods of film-making calmly and without any strain: his films would then have been of great methodological and aesthetic interest. But piece-meal experiments are too trivial a concern for a world-class director: by virtue of his status he is obliged to resolve world-scale problems and produce world-class films. It comes as no surprise therefore that Eisenstein has announced his intention to film Marx's *Capital* – no lesser theme would do.

As a result there have been painful and hopeless efforts to jump higher than his own height of which a graphic example is his latest film, *October*.

It would, of course, be difficult for any young director not to take advantage of all those material and organisational opportunities that flow from the title of genius, and Eisenstein has not withstood the temptations.

He has decided that he is his own genius-head, he has made a decisive break with his comrades in production, moved out of production discipline and begun to work in a way that leans heavily and directly on his world renown.

Eisenstein was asked to make a jubilee film for the tenth anniversary of October, a task which from the Lef point of view could only be fulfilled through a documentary montage of existing film material. This is in fact what Shub has done in her films, *The Great Road*, and *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*. Our position was that the October Revolution was such a major historical fact that any 'play' with this fact was unacceptable. We argued that the slightest deviation from historical truth in the representation of the events of October could not fail to disturb anyone with the slightest cultural sensitivity.

We felt therefore that the task that Eisenstein had been set – to give not the film-truth (*kinopravda*), of the October events, but a film-epic, a film-fantasy – was doomed in advance. But Eisenstein, who in some areas has moved towards the Lef position, did not share the Lef viewpoint in this instance – he believed that it was possible to find a method of representing October, not as documentary montage, but through an artistic 'play' film. Eisenstein of course rejected the idea of straightforward historical reconstruction from the start. The failure of *Moscow in October*<sup>13</sup> – a film based purely on the reconstruction of events – showed him to be right in this regard. What he needed was an artistic method for the

From the Lef standpoint such a method does not exist and indeed cannot exist. If Eisenstein had not been loaded down by the weighty title of genius, he could have experimented freely and his experiments might have brilliantly demonstrated the impossibility of the task set him. Now however, alongside pure experiment, he was obliged to create a complete jubilee film, and therefore to combine experiments with form and trite conventions in a way that sits curiously in one and the same work. The result is an unremarkable film.

While rejecting straightforward reconstruction, Eisenstein was obliged one way or another to deal with Lenin, the central figure of the October Revolution, in his jubilee film. To do so he resorted to the most absurd and cheapest of devices: he found a man who resembled Lenin to play the role of Lenin. The result was an absurd falsification which could only carry conviction for someone devoid of any respect or feeling for historical truth.

Eisenstein's film work on the heroic parts of his film analogous to the operations of our cliché painters, like Brodsky or Pchelin, and these sequences have neither cultural nor artistic interest.

Only in episodes fairly distantly related to the development of the October Revolution is his work as a director apparent and it is to these episodes that any discussion of the film has to be limited.

*The Women's Battalion.* This theme is given much greater prominence in the film *October* than the women's battalion had in the actual historical events. The explanation for this is that women in military uniform represent rich material for theatrical exploitation.

However, in structuring this theme Eisenstein has committed a crude political mistake. Carried away by his satirical portrayal of the woman soldier, he creates, instead of a satire on the women who defended the Provisional Government, a general satire on women who take up arms for any cause at all.

The theme of women involving themselves in affairs that don't concern them draws further strength in Eisenstein's work from juxtapositions in a metaphorical relation of the women soldier and images like Rodin's *The Kiss* and a mother and child.

The error is committed because Eisenstein exaggerates the satirical treatment of the women without constituting a parallel satire on the power which they were defending and therefore no sense of the political absurdity of this defence is conveyed.

*People and things.* Eisenstein's search for cinematic metaphors gives rise to a whole series of episodes which intercut the lines of objects and people (Kerensky and the peacock, Kerensky and the statue of Napoleon, the Mensheviks and the high society dinner plate) and in all these constructions, Eisenstein commits the same error.

The objects are not given any preliminary non-metaphorical significance. It is never made apparent that these objects were all to be found in the Winter Palace, that the plate, for instance, was left in the Smolny by the Institute originally housed there. There is therefore no context for their sudden and inexplicable emergence in a metaphorical relation.

While the verbal metaphor allows us to say 'as cowardly as a hare' because the hare in question is not a real hare, but a sum of signs, in film we cannot follow a picture of a cowardly man by a picture of a hare and consider that we have thereby constructed a metaphor, because in a film, the given hare is a real hare and not just a sum of signs. In film therefore a metaphor cannot be constructed on the basis of objects which do not have their own real destiny in terms of the film in which they appear. Such a metaphor would not be cinematic, but literary. This is clear in the sequence which shows a chandelier shuddering under the impact of October gunfire. Since we have not seen this chandelier before and have no sense of its pre-revolutionary history, we cannot be moved by its trembling and the whole image simply calls up incongruous questions....

The unthought out linkage of objects and people leads Eisenstein to build relations between them which have no metaphorical significance at all but are based purely on the principle of visual paradox; thus we have tiny people alongside huge marble feet, and the overlap from earlier metaphorical structures leads the viewer to look for metaphorical significance where none proves to exist.

*The opening of the bridge.* As a film director Eisenstein could obviously not resist filming the raising of the bridges in Petrograd, but this in itself was not enough. He extended the episode with piquant details, women's hair slipping over the opening, a horse dangling over the Neva. It goes without saying these *guignol* details have no relation to any of the film's themes — the given sequences are offered in isolation, like some spicy side dish, and are quite out of place.

*Falsification of history.* Every departure from historical fact is permissible only where it has been developed to the level of grotesque and the extent of its correspondence to any reality is no longer relevant....

When departure from historical fact does not approach the grotesque, but remains somewhere halfway, then the result is the most commonplace historical lie. There are many such instances in *October*.

1. The murder of a bolshevik by women in the July Days: There was a similar incident which involved the murder of a bolshevik selling *Pravda* by junkers. In an attempt to heighten the incident, Eisenstein brings in women and parasols — the result is unconvincing and in the spirit of trite stories about the Paris Commune. The parasols prove to have no symbolic value, they

function as a shabby prop and distort the reality of the event.

2. The sailors' smashing of the wine cellars: Everyone knows that one of the darker episodes of *October* was the battle over the wine cellars immediately after the overthrow and that the sailors not only did not smash the wine cellars, but looted themselves and refused to shoot at those who came after the wine. If Eisenstein had found some symbolic expression for this affair, say, demonstrating some kind of eventual resolution between proletarian consciousness and the incident, the sequence might have had some justification. But when a real sailor energetically smashes real bottles, what results is not a symbol, not a poster, but a lie. Eisenstein's view as it has been expressed in his most recent articles and lectures is that the artist-director should not be the slave of his material, that artistic vision or, to use Eisenstein's terminology, the 'slogan' must be the basis of cinematography. The 'slogan' determines not only the selection of material, but its form. The Lef position is that the basis of cinematic art is the material. To Eisenstein this seems too narrow, too prone to nail the flight of artistic imagination to the realm of the real.

Eisenstein does not see cinema as a means of representing reality, he lays claim to philosophical cinema-tracts. We would suggest that this is a mistake, that this direction can lead no further than ideographic symbolism. And *October* is the best proof of this.

From our point of view, Eisenstein's main contribution lies in his smashing the canons of the 'play' film, and carrying to the absurd the principle of creative transformation of material. This work was done in literature by the symbolists in their time, by the abstract artists in painting, and is historically necessary.

Our only regret is that Eisenstein, in the capacity of a world-class director, feels obliged to construct 80 per cent of his work on the basis of worn out conventions which consequently considerably lower the value of the experimental work he is trying to carry on in his films.

### *Eisenstein's October.*

*Reasons for failure*, V. Shklovsky.

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's talk of the need for a special department in cinema is unnecessary — his film is understandable in a general, not in a special way, and it doesn't call for panic.

Sergei Mikhailovich has raised the question of the reasons for failure, but first we must define what constitutes failure. We all know, many things were received as failures when they first appeared and only later re-assessed as innovations in form.

Sergei Mikhailovich has doubts about his own film in this respect and I too feel there are elements of straightforward failure in the film.

In terms of artistic devices, the film divides into two parts, Left and academy sections; and while the former is interestingly made, the latter is not.

The academy section of Eisenstein's film is distinguished mainly by its scale and the vast numbers of light units employed. Just by the way, isn't it time an end was put to the filming of wet things? The October Revolution did not take place in a constant downpour and was it worth drenching the Dvortsovaya Square and the Alexandrovsky Column? Thanks to the shower and the thousands of lights, the images look as if they've been smeared with machine oil, but there are some remarkable achievements in these sequences.

One of the branches of cinema is at the moment treading a line somewhere between vulgarity and innovation.

The essential task at the moment is to create the unambiguous cinematic image and reveal the language of film, in other words, to achieve precision in the action of cinematic expression on viewer, to create the language of the film shot and the syntax of montage.

Eisenstein has achieved this in his film. He sets up lines of objects and, for instance, moves from god to god coming in the end to the phallic negroid god and from this through the notion of 'statue' to Napoleon and Kerensky, with a consequent reduction. In this instance the objects resemble each other through only one of their aspects, their divinity, and are distinct from one another through their reverberations on the level of meaning. These reverberations create the sense of differentia essential to an art product. Through the creation of this transitional series, Eisenstein is able to lead the viewer where he wants him. The sequence is linked to the well-known ascent of the (Winter Palace) staircase by Kerensky. The ascent itself is represented realistically, while at the same time the film titles list Kerensky's ranks and titles.

The overstatement of the staircase and the basic simplicity of the ascent, carried out at the same regular pace, and the very disparity between the notions 'ascent' and 'staircase' together constitute a clearly comprehensible formal device. It represents an important innovation, but one which may contain within it certain flaws, that is, it may be imperfectly understood by the author himself.

A degenerated version of this innovation would take the form of an elementary cinematic metaphor with too close a correspondence between its parts; for instance a flowing stream and a moving stream of people, or the heart of some person as a forgetmenot. It is important in this context to bear in mind that the so-called image functions through its non-coincident components — its aureoles.

90 In any case, Eisenstein has forged a long way ahead in this direction. But a new formal means when it is created is always received as comic, by virtue of its novelty. That was how the cubists were received, and the impressionists, that's how Tolstoy reacted to the decadentes, Aristophanes to Euripides.

A new form is therefore most suited to material where the comic sense is appropriate. This is how Eisenstein has used his innovation. His new formal device, which will no doubt become general cinematic usage, is only employed by him in the structuring of negative features, to show Kerensky, the Winter Palace, the advance of Kornilov, etc.

To extend the device to the pathetic parts of the film would be a mistake, the new device is not yet appropriate to the treatment of heroism.

The film's failures can be explained by the fact that there is a dislocation between the level of innovation and the material – and therefore the official part of the film is forced rather than creative, instead of being well-constructed it is merely grandiose. The thematic points of the film, its knots of meaning, do not coincide with the most powerful moments of the film.

. . . but art needs advances rather than victories. Just as the 1905 revolution cannot be evaluated simply as a failure, so we can only talk of Eisenstein's failures from a specific standpoint.

Translations by Diana Matias

#### Notes

1. *Mystery Bouffe* was a verse play written by Mayakovsky in the summer of 1918. It received its first performance, directed by Meyerhold and with Mayakovsky himself playing three parts, on November 7 1918 at the Petrograd Conservatoire, and an expanded and topicalised version was staged, again by Meyerhold, on May Day 1921 at the RSFSR Theatre No. 1 in Moscow. Its subject was a celebration of the workers' victory over various enemies and wavers.
2. *War and the Universe* is a long poem by Mayakovsky written in 1916, but only published in full after the Revolution. The earlier of its five sections celebrate war as a the sole hygiene of the world in Marinettian fashion, but the later ones express a millenarian revolutionary pacifism.
3. *Battleship Potëmkin* (*Bronenosets 'Potëmkin'*) directed by Eisenstein, photography by Tisse, sub-titles by Aseev, 1926.
4. Meyerhold became a Communist after being captured by Whites while convalescing from a bout of TB in Yalta, and then rescued by the Red Army. Summoned to Moscow by Lunacharsky, he was made head of TEO, but to Lunacharsky's surprise proclaimed 'October in the Theatre', demanding the nationalisation of the elite Academic Moscow theatres, and setting up his own revolutionary theatre, the RSFSR Theatre No 1. When NEP was introduced in 1921, these projects had to be abandoned, and Meyerhold resigned as head of TEO.
5. Meyerhold's production of his own adaptation of Gogol's *Government Inspector* at the Meyerhold Theatre in December 1926 was

- regarded by the left as a retreat from the bio-mechanics of his dramaturgy from 1921-5 to a traditional naturalism.
6. Sergiev (now Zagorsk) is a town 44 miles North of Moscow built around the Monastery of Trinity-Sergius, home of Andrei Rublëv (c 1360-c 1430), the famous icon painter. Its suburbs became a centre for folk crafts, including painting on wood and it is to this that Tretyakov is presumably referring.
  7. *The Great Road* (Veliky Put), directed and edited by Esfir Šub, 1927. A compilation film telling the story of the ten years that had passed since the October Revolution.
  8. *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (Padeniye dinasti Romanovikh), directed and edited by Esfir Šub, 1927. A compilation film telling the story of the last years of the Russian empire.
  9. *The Thief of Baghdad*, directed by Raoul Walsh, 1924, starring Douglas Fairbanks Sr.
  10. *One Sixth of the World* (Shestaya chast mira), directed by Dziga Vertov, photography by Mikhail Kaufman, 1926. A film made for Gostorg, the State trade agency, to illustrate the resources of the USSR.
  11. *The Eleventh* (Odinnadtsati), directed by Dziga Vertov, photography by Mikhail Kaufman, edited by Elizaveta Svilova, 1928. Film celebrating the eleventh year of Soviet Power and the achievements of the first year of the first Five Year Plan in the Ukraine.
  12. *October* (Oktyabr), directed by Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov, photography by Edvard Tisse, 1928.
  13. *Moscow in October* (Moskva v Oktyabre), directed by Boris Barnet, 1927. The film tells the story of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Moscow in 1917.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND ACRONYMS

*These notes give brief biographical details of all the people mentioned by name in the texts from Lef and Novy Lef and the introductory material, where that information could be found, with the exception of a few political personalities so well-known as to make their inclusion superfluous.*

**AKHMATOVA, ANNA** (Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, 1889-1966)

One of the three outstanding Acmeist poets, the wife of Gumilëv (qv) and later of Punin (qv).

**AKhRR** (Assotsiatsiya Khudozhhnikov Revolutsionnoi Rossii)

Association of Revolutionary Russian Artists, 1922-32, the equivalent of VAPP (qv) and RAPP for fine artists.

**ALTMAN, NATAN ISAEVICH** (b 1889)

Artist, founder member of IZO (qv), head of Narkompros (qv) Academic Centre Art Department 1921.

**ART OF THE COMMUNE** (*Isskustvo Kommuny*)

IZO (qv) journal, founded by Osip Brik (qv) and Nikolai Punin (qv) in December 1918, 19 issues were published before IZO closed it in April 1919.

**ARVATOV, BORIS IGNATEVICH** (1896-1940)

Art and literary critic, member of Proletkult (qv) then of Lef (qv) and Novy Lef (qv). Advocate of 'formalist-sociological' method of literary criticism. Worked for IZO (qv).

- ASEEV, NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (1889-1963)**  
Poet, member of Moscow Centrifuge futurist group with Pasternak (qv) and Bobrov 1913-16, of Vladivostok futurist group Tvorchestvo (Creation) with Chuzhak (qv) and Tretyakov (qv) 1918-20, of *Lef* (qv) 1923-5 and of *Novy Lef* (qv) 1927-8. Left *Novy Lef* in 1928 with Mayakovsky (qv) to found REF.
- ASS'S TAIL (or Donkey's Tail, *Oslinyi Khvost*)**  
A group, or rather exhibition of futurist painters in 1912, including Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich (qv), Tatlin (qv), Von Wiesen, Ledentu and Chagall.
- AVERBAKH, LEOPOLD LEONIDOVICH (1903-37?)**  
Literary critic, leading member of VAPP (qv) and RAPP 1925-32. Arrested as Trotskyist in mid 1930's, death shortly thereafter.
- BABEL, ISAAK (1894-1941)**  
Short-story writer, author of *Red Cavalry* and *Tales of Odessa*, contributor to *Lef* (qv), arrested in 1930's, death 1941.
- BALMONT, KONSTANTIN DMITRIEVICH (1876-1942)**  
Symbolist poet, died in exile in Paris.
- BELINSKY, VISSARION GREGOREVICH (1811-48)**  
Russian literary critic, first Russian supporter and theoretician of realism.
- BELY, ANDREI (Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, 1880-1934)**  
Poet and writer, theorist of symbolism, anthroposophist, worked in TEO Narkompros (qv) during Civil War. Emigrated 1921, returned to USSR 1923.
- BENJAMIN, WALTER (1892-1940)**  
German critic and philosopher, friend of Brecht's (qv), born and worked in Berlin, emigrated to Paris 1933, committed suicide when captured trying to escape to Spain after the fall of France.
- BLYAKHIN, PAVEL A.**  
Writer on the cinema, leading official in Sovkino, wrote scripts, eg, for Perestiani's *Red Imps*, 1923.
- BPRS (Bund Proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller)**  
League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, German equivalent of RAPP (see VAPP), 1928-32.
- BRIK, OSIP MAKSIMOVICH (1884-1945)**  
Literary critic, member of Opozav (qv), husband of Lily Brik, friend of Mayakovsky (qv), editor of *Art of the Commune* (qv) for IZO (qv), editor of *Lef* (qv), *Novy Lef* (qv), split from *Novy Lef* with Mayakovsky in 1928 to form REF. Worked in cinema as scriptwriter, eg, for Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928).
- BRODSKY, ISAAK ISRAELOVICH (b 1884)**  
Russian artist.
- BURLYUK, DAVID DAVIDOVICH (1882-1967), VLADIMIR (1888-1917) and NIKOLAI (1890-1920)**  
Family of futurist poets and painters, members of Hylaea group. Vladimir was killed in the War, Nikolai in the Civil War. David in Vladivostok 1918, member of Tvorchestvo futurist group, in Japan 1920-22, USA from 1922 to his death.
- CHERNYSHEVSKY, NIKOLAI GAVRILOVICH (1828-89)**  
Russian revolutionary democrat, writer and literary critic, exiled to Siberia for political activity 1862-83, proponent of socially conscious realism in literature, author of *What is to be Done?*
- CHULKOV, GEORGY IVANOVICH (1879-1934)**  
Symbolist poet, prose writer and critic.
- CHUZHAK, NIKOLAI NAZIMOVICH (1876-1939?)**  
Member of Vladivostok futurist group Tvorchestvo (Creation) 1918-20, editor of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv), editor of volume *Literature of Fact* 1928, arrested 1938-9.

**COM-FUTS**

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Organisation of Communist Futurists in the Vyborg district of Petrograd led by Mayakovskiy (qv), 1919.

**DMITRIEV, VSEVOLOD**

Writer for *Art of the Commune* (qv), designer for Meyerhold's (qv) production of Verhaeren's *The Dawn* (1920).

**DYBENKO, PAVEL EFIMOVICH (1889-1938)**

Soviet military leader and statesman, representative of revolutionary Baltic sailors 1917, member of Council of People's Commissars, 1917, married Aleksandra Kollontai in 1918.

**EIKHENBAUM, BORIS (1886-1959)**

Formalist critic, member of Opozay (qv), author of studies on classical and modern Russian literature.

**EISENSTEIN, SERGEI MIKHAILOVICH (1898-1948)**

Russian film director, member of Proletkult (qv) 1917-20, scene-painter and director for Proletkult theatre and Factory of the Eccentric Actor, directed Tretyakov's *Gasmasks* 1923 (qv), first film *Strike* in 1924, then *Battleship Potëmkin* (1926), *October* (1928), *The General Line* (1929), trip to USA and Mexico 1929-32, later films *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and the two parts of *Ivan the Terrible* (1944 and '46).

**ESENIN, SERGEI ALEKSANDROVICH (1895-1925)**

Russian 'peasant' poet, Imagist after 1917, committed suicide 1925.

**EVREINOV, NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (1879-1953)**

Dramatist and theatrical producer, leader of the Saint Petersburg Ancient Theatre 1907-12, emigrated 1925.

**FURMANOV, DMITRY ANDREEVICH (1891-1926)**

Novelist, Bolshevik activist in Civil War, political commissar to Chapaev's guerrilla army, author of fictionalised account of this experience, *Chapaev* (1923), leading figure in VAPP (qv) 1925-6.

**GAVRILOVICH, EVGENY**

Member of Literary Centre of Constructivists 1924, moved to Litsfront (qv) positions in late 1920's, wrote five-year-plan sketches, stories about collective farms and war stories during the Second World War, Scripted Room's *Girl No 217*, 1944.

**GIPPIUS (or Hippius), ZINAIDA NIKOLAEVNA (1869-1945)**

Religious symbolist poet.

**GITIS (Gosudarstvenny Institut Teatralnogo Iskusstva)**

State Institute for Theatrical Art.

**GIZ**

See Gosizdat.

**GORKY, MAKSIM (Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, 1868-1936)**

Self-taught Russian writer, specialist in low-life themes, Bolshevik, member of *Vpered* group 1908-9, editor of *Letopis* and *Novaya Zhizn* in Petrograd 1913-17. Hostile to October Revolution, made peace with Soviets 1918, left Russia 1921, lived abroad until 1932 apart from brief visits in 1928 and 1930, returned permanently in 1932, helped organise Union of Soviet Writers (qv).

**GORODETSKY, SERGEI MITROFANOVICH (b 1884)**

Successful Slavophile Acmeist poet before the Revolution, later Soviet poet.

**GOSIZDAT**

State publishing house, organ of Narkompros (qv) 1918, autonomous body within Narkompros from May 1919, first head Vorovsky.

**GROSZ GEORGE (1893-1959)**

German graphic artist, collaborated with John Heartfield (qv) and Wieland Herzfelde (qv) in *Neue Jugend* and Malik Verlag, member of Berlin dada, worked with Piscator (qv) in the 1920's as stage designer, emigrated New York 1932, returned to Berlin three weeks before he died.

**GUMILEV, NIKOLAI STEPANOVICH (1886-1921)**

Acmeist poet, husband of Akhmatova (qv), executed 1921.  
**GURO, ELENA (Elena Gennikhovna von Notenberg, 1877-1913)**

Russian futurist poet and prose writer, member of Hylaea group.

**HEARTFIELD, JOHN (Helmut Herzfeld, 1891-1968)**

German artist, typographer and photomonteur, changed his name in 1914 as protest against German chauvinism, friend of Grosz (qv), co-founded Malik Verlag and *Neue Jugend* in 1916, joined KPD (qv) in 1918, Berlin dada 1919, 1929-33 photomontages for *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, emigrated to Prague 1933, to London 1938, returned to DDR 1950, settled in Leipzig. Brother of Wieland Herzfelde.

**HERZFELDE, WIELAND (b 1896)**

German writer and publisher, brother of John Heartfield (qv), co-founded Malik Verlag 1916, joined KPD (qv) 1918, Berlin dada 1919, emigrated to Prague 1933, to New York 1938, returned to DDR 1949, lives in Berlin.

**INBER, VERA MIKHAILOVNA (b 1890)**

Poet, member Literary Centre of Constructivists 1924, left constructivist movement for more conventional pro-Soviet position in the late 1920's.

**INKhUK**

Institute of Artistic Culture, founded Moscow 1920 under the auspices of IZO (qv), branches set up in Petrograd (led by Tatlin, qv) and Vitebsk (led by Malevich, qv), Kandinsky (qv) drafted its initial programme for constructivist art, dominated by constructivists and productivists.

**IZO**

Arts department of Narkompros (qv), founded 1918, initially headed by Shterenberg in Petrograd and Tatlin (qv) in Moscow, dominated by Futurists, suprematists and constructivists, its journal was *Art of the Commune* (qv).

**JOHANSON (or Joganson), BORIS VLADIMIROVICH**

Constructivist painter and designer, member of Inkukhuk (qv) and of Obomkhu, the Society for Young Artists, argued for a completely utilitarian art.

**KAMENSKY, VASILY VASILIEVICH (1884-1961)**

Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, author of *Stenka Razin* (1915), supporter of October Revolution, member of Lef (qv) and in the circus section of TEO (qv).

**KANDINSKY, VASSILY (1866-1944)**

Russian artist, member of Munich Blaue Reiter group, contributor to the Knave of Diamonds exhibitions 1910 and 1912 (qv), member of IZO (qv) Kollegia 1918, founder member of Inkukhuk (qv) 1920, teacher in Vkhutemas (qv), emigrated to Germany and joined Bauhaus 1922.

**KAUFMAN, MIKHAIL**

Brother of Dziga Vertov (qv) and his close collaborator and cameraman, director of *Spring* (1929).

**KHLEBNIKOV, VELIMIR (Viktor Vladimirovich, 1885-1922)**

Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, pioneer of 'trans-sense' poetry.

**KLUTSIS, G.**

Constructivist poster designer, member of Obmokhu, the Society of Young Artists, and later worked in the Vitebsk artists' workshop Unovis.

**KNAVE OF DIAMONDS (or Jack of Diamonds, *Bubnovy Valej*)**

Group of Russian avant-garde painters founded about 1910 by Lentulov, Konchalovsky, Falk and Mashkov. Larionov, Goncharova and Malevich (qv) contributed to their earlier exhibitions.

**KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*)**

Germann Communist Party, founded December 1918.

**KRUCHENYKH, ALEKSEI ELISEEVICH (b 1886)**

Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group before World War One, member of 41<sup>st</sup> group in Tiflis 1917-19, pioneer of 'trans-sense' poetry, member of *Lef* (qv), editor of Khlebnikov's works.

**KULESHOV, LEV (1899-1970)**

Russian film director, teacher at Moscow Film Institute 1920, pioneer of montage techniques later used by Eisenstein (qv) and Pudovkin. Films include *Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1923), *Death-ray* (1925) and *By the Law* (1926).

**KUSHNER, BORIS ANISIMOVICH (1888-1937)**

Linguist and critic, founder member of Opojaz (qv), cubo-futurist poet, member of Centrifuge group 1913-16, leader of Com-Futs (qv), editor of *Art of the Commune* (qv) 1918, of *Lef* (qv) 1923-5, of *Novy Lef* (qv) 1927-8, member of Litfront (qv) 1928-30.

**LAVINSKY, ANTON**

Architect, sculptor and stage designer, editor of *Lef* (qv) 1923-5, *Novy Lef* (1927-8), worked for ROSTA (qv) 1919-20, member of Inkukh (qv), productivist.

**LEF**

Left Front of the Arts and its magazine, published 1923-5, members included Mayakovsky (qv), Aseev (qv), Tretyakov (qv), Brik (qv), Kushner (qv), Arvatov (qv), Lavinsky (qv) and others.

**LIBEDINSKY, YURY NIKOLAEVICH (1898-1959)**

Proletarian novelist, Bolshevik from 1921, member of October Group, editor of *On Literary Guard*, leading member of VAPP (qv) and RAPP 1925-32. Author of *The Week* (1922), *Tomorrow* (1923) and *The Commissars* (1926).

**LITFRONT**

Left-wing opposition to RAPP (see VAPP) 1925-30 including former *On Guard* leadership, Lefists like Kushner and others, advocated 'revolutionary romanticism' and sketch literature as opposed to RAPP's realism.

**LUKACS, GYORGY (1885-1971)**

Hungarian philosopher and critic, joined Hungarian Communist Party in 1918, participated in Soviet Government of Hungary 1919, editor of *Kommunismus* 1920-21, expelled from CC of HCP in 1928, active in Berlin 1931-3 as member of BPRS (qv). Emigrated to USSR 1933, returned to Hungary 1945.

**LUNACHARSKY, ANATOLY VASILIEVICH (1875-1933)**

Social-Democrat from 1899, joined Bolsheviks in 1904, member of *Vpered* group with Gorky (qv) and Bogdanov 1908, rejoined Bolsheviks in August 1917. Commissar for Education in the Soviet government 1917-29. Head of Narkompros (qv).

**MALEVICH, KASIMIR (1878-1935)**

Painter, contributed to first Knave of Diamonds (qv) and Ass's Tail (qv) exhibitions. Founder of suprematism 1916. Taught at VKhutemas (qv) and at Vitebsk (Unovis) 1919. Director of Moscow Museum of Artistic Culture 1922-28. Buried in a constructivist coffin of his own design.

**MANILOV**

A character from Gogol's *Dead Souls* who spends his days constructing elaborate plans which are never realised.

**MARINETTI, FILIPPO TOMMASO (1876-1944)**

Italian futurist, published first futurist manifesto 1909, visited Russia 1914 but was hostilely received by most Russian futurists, joined Fascist movement 1919, left 1920, rejoining 1923 or 1924, to become secretary of the Italian Union of Writers 1929. Went to fight on the

Russian front 1942, returned to Italy the following year where he died of a heart attack. Author of *Zang Tumb Tuum* (1914), etc.

**MAYAKOVSKY, VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH (1893-1930)**

Futurist poet, member of Hylaea group, rallied to the October Revolution in 1918, worked for IZO (qv), then for ROSTA (qv) 1919-22, contributed to *Art of the Commune* (qv), edited *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv). Split from Lef in 1928 with Brik and Aseev, founding REF (Revolutionary Front of the Arts). Joined RAPP (see VAPP) 1930, committed suicide April 14, 1930. Wrote several plays and filmscripts as well as poetry, and acted in a number of films, notably Slavinsky's *The Lady and the Hooligan* (1918) and Turkin's *Shackled by Film* (1918), to his own scenario.

**MEYERHOLD, VSEVOLOD EMILEVICH (1874-1942)**

Theatrical producer, worked in Moscow Arts, Komissarshevskaya and Petersburg Imperial Theatres before the War, recognised Soviet government after October, headed Petrograd TEO (qv) 1918-May 1919, did propaganda work in South Russia during the Civil War, becoming a Communist in 1920. Returned to Moscow the same year, became head of TEO, proclaimed 'October in the Theatre'. Resigned in 1921 when his radical policies failed. Worked in Moscow theatres according to the method of 'bio-mechanics'. Returned to a more classical style with *The Government Inspector* (1926). His theatre closed in 1938, arrested 1939, died in prison 1942.

**MEZZANINE OF POETRY**

Moscow group of futurist poets 1913, including Shershenevich (qv), Khrisanf (Zack), Ivnev, Bolshakov and Tretyakov (qv).

**MOSCOW LINGUISTICS CIRCLE**

Group of linguists, folklorists and formalist critics founded 1915, its members included Pëtr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson and Grigorii Vinokur (qv).

**MUZO**

Musical department of Narkompros (qv) corresponding to IZO (qv) in the visual arts, headed by A. S. Lourie in 1918.

**NADSON, SEMEN YAKOVLEVICH (1862-87)**

Minor poet, author of sentimental verse, became epitome of bad poetic taste.

**NARKOMPROS**

People's Commissariat of Education, the Soviet State Department dealing with education and the arts, headed by Lunarcharsky (qv) 1917-29.

**NOVY LEF**

Journal founded by Mayakovsky (qv) to replace *Lef* (qv) in 1927-28 issues, edited after July 1928 by Tretyakov (qv).

**OPOYAZ**

Society for the Study of Poetic Language, founded in St. Petersburg 1916, its members included Lev Yakubinsky (qv), E. V. Polivanov, Viktor Shklovsky (qv), Boris Eikhbaum (qv), S. I. Bernstein and Osip Brik (qv), joined by Jury Tynyanov (qv) in the early 1920's. One of the two centres of formalist criticism, the other being the Moscow Linguistics Circle (qv).

**OSINSKY, N. (1887-1938)**

Communist journalist and literary critic.

**OTTWALT, ERNST (1901-?)**

German writer and critic, Communist, member of BPRS (qv), friend of Brecht's (qv). 1933 emigrated to the USSR, arrested for espionage 1935, executed sometime thereafter.

**PASTERNAK, BORIS NIKOLAEVICH (b 1869)**

Poet, member of Moscow futurist group Centrifuge 1913-16, editor of *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef*.

PCHELIN, Vladimir Nikolaevich (b 1869).

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Russian artist.

PILNYAK, BORIS (Boris Andrecvich Vogau, 1894-1941?)

Russian novelist and short-story writer, 'fellow-traveller', author of *The Naked Year* (1922), *The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea*.

PINKERTON, NAT

The cheaply printed adventures of Nat Pinkerton were so popular in Russia in the early 20th century that the name became generic for detective stories or serials of a similar type. After the Revolution, there were some attempts at 'Red Pinkertons'.

PISCATOR, ERWIN (1893-1966)

German stage director, member of Berlin dada 1918, popular theatre in Königsberg 1919-20, worked at various theatres in Berlin 1920-30, film and theatrical work in the USSR 1930-36, left USSR for Paris, then USA 1938-51, organising the drama workshop at the New School for Social Research, returned to the BRD 1951, dramatic work all over West Germany until his death

POPOVA, LYUBOV (1889-1924)

Painter in Knave of Diamonds group (qv), later Constructivist and Productivist. Active in Inkhuks (qv), teacher in Vkhutemas (qv), theatre designs for Meyerhold (qv).

PROLETKULT

Association of proletarian cultural organisations, founded formally October 1917 with the aim of creating a proletarian culture to replace the existing bourgeois culture. Main theorists A. A. Bogdanov, F. I. Kalinin, P. I. Lebedev (later a member of VAPP, qv), P. M. Kerzhentsev. Reached its peak in 1920 after which it was reorganised as a department of Narkompros (qv), then declined, finally losing even Narkompros support in 1922.

PROTAZANOV, YAKOV (1881-1945)

Film director whose career began before the Revolution, most successful of traditional directors after the Revolution, films include *Aelita* (1924) and *The Forty-First* (1927), etc.

PU(G)NI, IVAN ALBERTOVICH (1894-1956)

Suprematist painter, follower of Malevich (qv), financed Tramway 5 exhibition 1915, helped organise re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace 1918, emigrated 1920.

PUNIN, NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH (1883-1953)

Art critic, member of IZO (qv) 1918, editor of *Art of the Commune* (qv), second husband of Akhmatova (qv).

RABIS

Union of Artistic Workers.

RAPP

See VAPP.

RODCHENKO, ALEKSANDR (1891-1956)

Painter, Suprematist under Malevich's (qv) influence 1915, member of IZO (qv) 1918, member of Inkhuks (qv) 1920, taught at Vkhutemas (qv) 1921, member of Obmokhu, the Society of Young Artists, constructivist, productivist, typography for Vertov's (qv) films and *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv), sets and costumes for Meyerhold 1929-31. Husband of Stepanova (qv).

ROSTA

Russian Telegraph Agency, responsible for propaganda during the Civil War, employed Mayakovsky (qv) Tseremnykh, Ivanov, Kerzhentsev and others to make the hand-copied posters for display in shop windows known as 'Rosta Windows' 1919-22.

ROZANOV, VASILY VASILIEVICH (1856-1919)

Symbolist prose writer, philosopher and critic, subject of a study by Viktor Shklovsky (qv) 1921.

**RYKOV, ALEKSEI IVANOVICH (1881-1938)**

Russian Social-Democrat from 1899, Bolshevik 1903, urged coalition government in November 1917, member of Right deviation 1928, expelled CPSU(B) 1938.

**SALTYKOV-SHCEDRIN, MIKHAIL E. (1826-89)**

Russian satirical writer.

**SELVINSKY, ILYA LVOVICH (b 1899)**

Constructivist poet, member of Literary Centre of Constructivists, 1924, composer of 'statistical' poems, author of *Commander of the Second Army*, produced by Meyerhold (qv) 1929.

**SERAPION BROTHERHOOD**

Petrograd literary group formed in 1921, named after the Hoffmann stories, members include Lev Lunts, K. Fedin, Ilya Gruzdev, V. Kaverin, N. Nikitin, M. Slonimsky, M. Zoshchenko. Stood for creative freedom independent of politics. Shklovsky (qv) was close to this group initially.

**SEVERYANIN (Igor-Severyanin, Igor Vasilievich Lotarev, 1887-1941).**

Poet, leader of the 'ego-futurist' group of St Petersburg 1911-14, more cosmopolitan and Bohemian than Hylaea.

**SHKLOVSKY, VIKTOR BORISOVICH (b 1893)**

Formalist critic, founder-member of Opojaz (qv), in emigration 1922-3, editor of *Novy Lef* (qv), worked in the literary department of Sovkino in late 1920's, author of *A Sentimental Journey* (1923) and many other works, including filmscripts, eg, for Kuleshov's *By the Law* (1926).

**SHERSHENEVICH, VADIM GARBUELEVICH (1893-1942)**

Futurist poet, member of Mezzanine of Poetry (qv), supporter of Marinetti (qv) in Russia, member of imagist movement 1917-27, worked for film industry in late 1920's.

**SHUB, ESFIR ILISHNA (1894-1959)**

Subtitle writer 1922, assistant to Eisenstein (qv) in *Strike* (1924), director of documentary films and historical compilations. Films include *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1926), *The Great Road* (1927).

**STEPANOVA, VARVARA (1894-1958)**

Painter, contributor to Knave of Diamonds (qv) 1910-11, Vice-Director of art and literature department of IZO (qv) 1920, President of IZO branch of Rabis (qv), worked with Popova (qv) in Tsindel textile factory and designed costumes for Meyerhold (qv) in 1922, contributed to *Lef* (qv) 1923, head of textile department of Vkhutemas (qv) 1924, designed the magazine *Sovietskoye Kino* and cinema sets 1927. Wife of Rodchenko (qv).

**TATLIN, VLADIMIR EGRAFOVICH (1885-1953)**

Painter and sculptor, exhibited with Larionov and Malevich (qv) in League of Youth exhibition 1911, Ass's Tail (qv) and Knave of Diamonds (qv) 1912, Counter-reliefs 1913, Tramway 5 1915, Head of Moscow IZO (qv) 1918, taught at Vkhutemas (qv) and Vkhutein, works include Project for a Moment to the Third International (1920) and Letatlin (1931).

**TEO**

Theatre department of Narkompros (qv), headed first by Olga Kameneva, than by Lunarcharsky (qv) himself. Subordinated to Tsentroteatr 1919. Meyerhold (qv) appointed head of TEO 1920, proclaimed 'October in the Theatre', demanding full nationalisation, imposition of revolutionary ideology and use of advanced theatrical technique, resigned on failure to achieve this in 1922.

**TOLSTOY, ALEKSEI NIKOLAEVICH (1882-1945)**

Russian novelist, exile in Berlin after Revolution, returned to Russia 1923, as well as numerous novels worked on scenarios for films, eg, Petrov's *Peter the Great* (1937). His novel *Aelita* (1922) was filmed by

- Protazanov (qv).
- TOMASHEVSKY, BORIS V. (1890-1957)**  
Formalist critic, member of Moscow Linguistics Circle (qv), first studies on statistical metrics, expert on Pushkin.
- TRETYAKOV, SERGEI MIKHAILOVICH (1892-1939?)**  
Originally futurist poet, member of group Mezzanine of Poetry (qv) 1913, in Baku and Tiflis 1917, member of the Vladivostok futurist group Tvorchestvo ('Creation') 1918-20, in Chita 1920, in Moscow by 1922 where he participated in *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv) as a critic and theorist, wrote plays for Meyerhold (qv) and Eisenstein (qv) including *Gasmasks* (1924), *Listen Moscow!* (1924) and *Roar China!* (1930). Continued to edit *Novy Lef* after Mayakovsky (qv) left to form REF. Arrested in 1937, the exact date of his death shortly thereafter is unknown.
- TUGENDKHOLD (Jacques Tugendhold)**  
Russian critic, author of a book on Aleksandra Ekster.
- TUMANNY, DIR (Nikolai Panov, b 1903)**  
Member of Literary Centre of Constructivists, 1924
- TYNYANOV, YURY (1894-1943)**  
Formalist critic, member of Opozay (qv), teacher at Leningrad Institute of Art History 1921-30, author of historical novels and scenarios for Kozintsev's *The Cloak* (1926) and *SVD* (1927), and Feinzimmer's *Lt. Kizhe* (1934) from his own novel.
- UNION OF PEASANT WRITERS (All-Union of Peasant Writers)**  
Peasant equivalent of VAPP (qv), and RAPP, allied with it in Federation of Organisations of Soviet Writers (FOSP), dissolved with RAPP into Union of Soviet Writers (qv) in 1932.
- UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS**  
General organisation of Soviet Writers set up in 1934 to replace RAPP, UPW, etc.
- VAPP**  
All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, founded 1920 by descendants of Proletkult (qv), journal *On Guard*, dominated by Lelevich, Vardin and Rodon; more moderate leadership after 1925 including Averbakh (qv), Libedinsky (qv), Kisho and Ermilov, journal became *On Literary Guard*. Reorganised as RAPP (Russian APP) in 1928, controversy with left groups (Litfront, Lef, qv). Dissolved to form Union of Soviet Writers (qv) 1932.
- VERTOV, DZIGA (Denis Kaufman, 1896-1954)**  
Film director, originally futurist noise composer, newsreel and propaganda films for Red Army during Civil War, Kino-Pravda documentaries 1922-5, participated in *Lef* (qv) and *Novy Lef* (qv) *Kino-glaz* (1925), *One Sixth of the Earth* (1926), *Stride Soviet!* (1926), *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1931), *Donbas Symphony* (1934) and *Three Songs to Lenin* (1934), etc.
- VESELY, ARTEM (Nikolai Ivanovich Kochukov, b 1899)**  
Son of a Volga stevedore, Communist, proletarian novelist dealing with Civil War themes, member of workers' co-operative Krug 1932, close to Pilnyak (qv) in style. Novels include *My Country, Russia Washed in Blood*.
- VESNIN, LEONID ALEKSANDROVICH (1880-1933), VIKTOR (1882-1950) and ALEKSANDR (1883-1950)**  
Architects, Aleksandr also a stage designer, member of Inkukh (qv). All three brothers taught at Vkhutemas (qv) 1921-5, designs include Palace of Soviets competition entry 1923, Pravda building design 1924 and Lenin Library project 1928-9. Founder members of OSA (Association of Contemporary Architects) 1925.
- VINOKUR, GRIGORY OSIPOVICH (b 1896)**  
Linguist, member Moscow Linguistics Circle (qv) 1915-19.

100 VKhUTEMAS

Moscow School of applied arts and Higher Technical-Artistic Studios, teachers included Tatlin (qv), Malevich (qv), Kandinsky (qv), Rosanova (qv) and Pevsner.

VOLKENSHTEIN, VLADIMIR MIKHAILOVICH (b 1883)

Dramatist and dramatic critic, demanded a new dramatic repertory for the traditional theatre rather than Meyerhold's (qv) revolution of theatrical form. Argued for age-old significance of realism.

VOLODARSKY, V. (Moisey Markovich Goldshtein, 1891-1918)

Ukrainian revolutionary, member of Bund, emigrated to New York 1913, returned 1917, Mezhrayontsy, then Bolshevik, member of VTsIK, commissar in army on the Rumanian front, killed in action.

VORONSKY, ALEKSANDR KONSTANTINOVICH (1884-?)

Editor of 'fat' periodical *Krasnaya Nov* (Red Virgin Soil) 1921-7, supporter of 'fellow-travelling' writers (Esenin, qv, Pilnyak, qv, Ivanov, Tikhonov, etc.), opponent of *On Guards* and VAPP (qv). Expelled from CPSU(B) for Trotskyism and banished to Siberia 1927, recanted and returned to Moscow 1930, arrested and executed about 1937.

WITTFOGEL, KARL AUGUST (b 1896)

German Communist playwright and sociologist, author of *Rote Soldaten* (1921), *Der Mann der eine Idee hat* (1922), *Die Mutter* (1922), *Die Flüchtlings* (1922), etc. Active in BPRS (qv) 1930-32. Left KPD (qv) in 1934 and emigrated to USA, became famous as orientalist, author of *Oriental Despotism* (1957).

YAKUBINSKY, LEV (?-1946)

Formalist critic, member of Opojaz (qv) 1916, joined CPSU (B) 1917

ZDANEVICH, ILYA MIKHAILOVICH (b 1894)

Russian futurist, born Tiflis, friend of Larionov and Goncharova 1913, member of Tiflis futurist group 41° 1917-20, exile in Paris since early 1920s. Author of Pentalogy *aslaablichya*.

ZELINSKY, KORNELY LYUCHIANOVICH (b 1896)

Member of the Literary Centre of Constructivists, 1924, and of Literary Brigade no 1, 1930. Chief theoretician of the Constructivist movement in literature, attacked in Party resolution on literature, July 1925

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Although he was not an active participant in the stormy, critical movement in Russia known as Formalism, the film theory of Lev Kuleshov was formalistic in approach; and in the measure that Russian Formalism prefigured contemporary structuralist and semiological approaches to the analysis of art and culture, it will be proposed here that Kuleshov's writings justifiably may be located among the first stirrings in semiological studies of the film.

During the 1920's one of the foremost proponents of formalism in Russia was the distinguished literary critic and theoretician, Viktor Shklovsky. Still living, Shklovsky both worked with and wrote about Kuleshov (*Ikh nastoyaschee* (1927), *Za sorok let* (1965), *Zhyli-byli* (1966), and as I hope will be evident in this brief introduction, a discussion of some of Shklovsky's conceptions of the cinema may serve to elucidate the accompanying selected text by Kuleshov. Thus, in these prefatory remarks to Kuleshov's work I have chosen to bring to bear some correspondences from other sources — to urge, in that measure, that the Kuleshov writings be examined from the perspective of contemporary work in semiology and structuralism. Such an approach seems to me more pertinent at the present time than interpolations of what is now largely self-evident, though none the less, highly significant material. As one additional frame of reference, I would refer the reader to two career articles on Lev Kuleshov, which could considerably enrich and substantiate these translations and introduction — the first, by my colleague, Professor Steven P. Hill in the journal, *Film Culture*, No. 44, Spring 1967; the second, my own, in *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1971.

Any discussion of the cinema deals with an evolving and hence chimerical art form. Likewise, any analysis of how we derive meaning from the cinema is, perforce, markedly affected not only by the aesthetic inventiveness of talented artists, as Kuleshov pointed out, but also by aggregates of new options of expression which are provided the film-maker through innovation in film technology and alterations in the phenomenal environment itself. This latter, often overlooked, evolving milieu — the 'real' surfaces of which reflect light into the lens — was of crucial significance for Kuleshov; and to acknowledge it is requisite to understanding why one might now appropriately define film as embedded in-the-world. It is, at once, perhaps what currently attracts an alienated, disenfranchised generation to the film; and is, at the same time, what

104 Shklovsky described as the gravest shortcoming of the cinema. For it is precisely to this invariance between the cinematic *signifier* (image or shot) and the *signified* (object) that Shklovsky attributed the cinema's aesthetic inadequacy, as compared with literature (Shklovsky, pp 7-15).

Nonetheless, as the architecture of the world-out-there changes in the structure of its appearance, so the signs in the phenomenal world from which the film extracts its aspects of signification likewise change. To put it another way: as the world-out-there changes the way it is comprehensible (or seemingly incomprehensible) to us, so the film changes the way it makes its meaning.

To say, as Bergman loves to, that film has nothing to do with literature is, of course, furtively to say that it has a great deal to do with it. Apart from the fact that both are representational art forms, both are also complex systems of signification, as Barthes points out. (Barthes, *Elements*, p 31). For the Russian theorists the homology between the two has formed the basis of most discourse about the film. Neither Kuleshov nor Shklovsky were exceptions to this.

With the publication of his *Yavlenie i smysl* (*Phenomenon and Meaning*) in 1914 in Moscow, the Russian philosopher, Gustav Shpet, a student of Husserl's, introduced phenomenology to Russian intellectual circles, which foreshadowed and influenced one of the principal directions of Russian critical thought until the official prescriptions of Formalism came with the Stalinist trials and purges of the 1930's. The Formalist movement provided a highly heuristic, structuralist methodology for dealing with analysis of art, especially of literature.

Applied to film the formalist approach sought to analyse the structure of perception and cognition of the work of art – as well as the inseparable nexus between those ideational structures and the structure of the work of art itself. As it is hoped can be seen in the accompanying text by Kuleshov this method sought to study the work of art as a constellation of signs-perceived, rather than objectifying the work of art (as did the New Critics, under the influence of British Empiricism) as some indisputably affirmable datum, some disembodied presence. The quest for the structure of the ephemeral nexus between the work of art and its auditor lead to a study of the process of signification itself, to a study of how meaning in art communicates, and to the origins of what has been evolving as semiology.

Because when they dealt with film they dealt with a developing avatar, the early semiological studies of the cinema, including Kuleshov's, have dated somewhat. As cinematic language became inflected by broadening technological possibilities, even accurately articulated postulates eroded under the pressure and abrasion of transition. For example, the very basis of discussions of montage itself changed with the advent of sound, and many formulations

about a montage for silent cinema were rendered obsolete. But most of the axioms which the Russians proposed – because they dealt with fundamental structures of signification and essences of expressive form – survive and remain workable. Above all, the Russian approach to film analysis was molecular, essentialist. It strove to parse the film, to identify, and to create a taxonomy of cinematic expression. The chief Formalist luminaries, Tynyanov, Brik, Eichenbaum, Jakobson, and Shklovsky all wrote about and/or directly participated in the making of films; and almost without question influenced the film-makers with whom they were associated.

The thrust of the Russian approach was bi-directional: one path opened on an analysis of film itself (film extant), as an attempt to penetrate *film-meaning* deeper; the second opened on a systematic method for encoding images as signs, not so much in order to create a prescriptive cinematic grammar to which filmmakers should-would-might adhere, but to elaborate a morphology of film language (if indeed there was one): to make future expression more potentially inventive by making the act of (active) present expression clearer. As Shklovsky cautiously but auspiciously noted, writing in 1927, since the cinema had not yet sedimented sufficiently to have (what Saussure would term) its own *langue*, Russian film theory was not immediately able to create semantic tools for dealing with film very extensively on a connotational basis; nor was it prepared, early on, to discuss the relationship of theme (*sujet*) to form; nor was it, at inception, prepared to develop a hierarchy of merit for films – especially not one based on the extent to which a given film did or did not fulfil its quota of stylistic effects. In short, Formalist film criticism, in that sense, was lacking an ethical scaffolding. It was to pay dearly for that.

As Shklovsky explained, writing about Kuleshov, and as Kuleshov affirmed in the accompanying text, it was only a temporary occlusion, a politic delay, not an intention grounded in any Formalist canon, which fixated formalist film analysis on structure. Indeed, especially as concerned rapidly evolving cinematic forms, the formalist approach was an attempt to pierce the metamorphous, epiphenomenal surface to get at the essence of the phenomena themselves. What is more, Kuleshov's own sense of cinematic 'material' is vacillant, as these writings evidence. For instance, while he implies that the Kuleshov group only temporarily put aside the study of the 'real material' (and one would take that to mean the phenomenal content which the shot records), his subsequent conclusions in the selfsame book reveal him to incline (almost stridently, polemically) toward the definition of cinematic 'material' as the celluloid itself. Besides, to the extent than Kuleshov was governed in his analysis by the Principle of Parsimony (as a reflection, one feels, of his youthful, almost ingenuous Marxism), he does, in fact, erect a hierarchy of values; while

- 106 Shklovsky's reverence for literature collapses any film analysis of his into inevitable comparison, if not to say, contest between the two – the relative merits of film always being measured against established literary masterpieces, like Tolstoy's.

Shklovsky, who worked closely with Kuleshov on two scripts and whose influence on the latter's theoretical work can be read clearly, approached his film analysis by asking, precisely as did Kuleshov, what essential, basic, irreducible attributes the cinema possessed. In self-response, Shklovsky developed the following three axioms. I cite them briefly here for comparison with Kuleshov's. For Shklovsky, the first property of film was that a discrepant relationship between the shot or image (in Barthes' terms, the *signifier*) and the object (*signified*) of the shot did *not* exist. This, for Shklovsky, was precisely where the aesthetic power and fecundity of expression lay in literature and precisely what was absent in the film, as briefly mentioned earlier.

The second property of the film was that the shot *designated* its object rather than *imaged* it. This Shklovsky attributed to the function of the shot as sign. To put it another way, for Shklovsky, the perceptual process of cinema-viewing was not a question of cognition so much as recognition.

The third property of film, one which Shklovsky developed in a rather elegant proof, concerned the signification functions of depth and perspective in the two-dimensional cinematic image. Put perhaps too simply, what Shklovsky argued was that both perspective and depth in the shot were aspects of redundancy (in linguistic terms) and of a contingent and predictable dependence on the milieu of the shot. In other words, no image can be sensible in cinema unless it stands in some previously held relationship to something else, either affirmable within the parameters of a single take or confirmable between shots (in a sequence) by a similar relationship established through montage. As Shklovsky put it: if in a film you see some sort of object and do not know its logical relationship to its surroundings, you cannot know precisely what it is nor in which area of the depth of field within the shot it belongs. In short, you cannot know its significance. As an amusing example, Shklovsky cites his own inability to recognise what 'some sort of stick' across the top of the screen was, while viewing a film, until he was given to see through the context of the film that it was part of an automobile and, hence, he recognised, the top of the windscreen. (Shklovsky, p 21). All of which is another way of saying that we 'complete' the screen image and infer perspective, depth, and signification of the shot; or, in phenomenological terms, that perception is intentional. Or as Arnheim and Linden would have it, vision is hardly a passive act but is explorative and based on expectation and anticipation. (Linden, p 170).

Paradoxically, these properties of cinematic language, which for Shklovsky are impoverishments of expressive form as compared

with literature, are precisely, one suspects, what made the cinema exciting for Kuleshov. For as Kuleshov saw it and Shklovsky didn't, the meaning one makes in the film affirms for one an associational, syntagmatic meaning of being-in-the-world – the world taken as an aggregate system of (set of all) signs, in which each shot is an anchorage point (a subset). (Barthes, *Elements*, p 49).

What Kuleshov demonstrated by means of his experiments with Mozhukhin (cited in detail by Pudovkin), and, indeed, what is everywhere evident in his writings, is that signification in his cinema principally does occur by virtue of *syntagm* rather than *system* (terms generalised by Saussure and adopted by both Jakobson and Barthes). The montage of Kuleshov's conception thus elaborates into a semiology of *syntagmatic* (associational) relationships. And thus, the 'confusion' evident in Kuleshov's discussion of 'cinematic material' is one which collapses his discussion of montage into Jakobson's model of *metaphor/metonymy* polarities.

As a progeny of Griffith's, Kuleshov's montage clearly finds its richest layers of signification in *metonymic* not *metaphoric* function. (Barthes, *Elements*, p 60). That was why Shklovsky ruefully observed of Kuleshov's cinematography, 'In cinematic expression, the relationship between the photographed object and the shot is at present constant. In literary expression it is not, and what is more, it is in this discrepancy that the creative will of the artist is found'. (*Ikh nastoyaschee*, p 15). For Shklovsky, then, the 'material' of the cinema was clearly the image itself; and since, for him, the fecundity of literary imagery lay in metaphor, the film-image was condemned to its contingent relationship to the material phenomena, which it mechanically recorded. It could never explode and transcend those constraints, which was the very essence of literary metaphor. In reference to the ubiquitous Tolstoy, Shklovsky makes eminently clear why – given the cinema in its then present state of development – he was convinced that this was so: Tolstoy, noted Shklovsky, does not need things as they are, but rather as he imagines them. Thus, it seemed to Shklovsky, the power of literary expression was founded on the very inadequacy of human speech; and only metaphor, of which he found the cinema then incapable, could transcend such limitations. Nonetheless, because of his overriding interest in it, Shklovsky ultimately hedges his misgivings that the cinema is art by suspending judgment until it can develop its own expressive language. Indeed, he exhorts it to. (Shklovsky, pp 14-23.)

If Kuleshov had reasoned as Shklovsky did, he might well have prematurely undertaken a semiotics of physiognomy, garment, furniture, architecture, and the like. Instead, this is the second-order 'material' of cinema which he wisely (and, one feels, intuitively) deferred – taking up, instead, the very syntax of the film as its first-order 'material'. (See Barthes' discussion of *complex*

108 and subsidiary systems in *Elements*, pp 30-34.)

Methodological investigations always precipitate slowly in meta-languages which we create to deal with languages. Kuleshov's film formalism – as, indeed, contemporary semiology of cinema – is open to the charge of being too abstract, too sterile, and too valueless. In defence, one is impelled to say that only now do semiological studies seem capable of supporting investigations of those structures of human experience which begin to constitute the fuller human milieu. If to exist is to incorporate meaning into the self and the world of the self, as Merleau-Ponty has suggested, semiology becomes a study of the emerging patterns which the forms take, by means of which we make our meaning – in life, as in art. Speaking about writers in terms applicable to all artists, Barthes has formidably informed the semiological approach – and, by extension, its Formalist antecedents and, poignantly, Kuleshov's own fate: 'What we hope to do . . . is to sketch this connection; to affirm the existence of a formal reality independent of language and style; to try to show that this dimension of Form equally, and not without an additional tragic implication, binds the writer to his society; finally to convey the fact that there is no Literature without an Ethic of language. (Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, p 12.)

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The purpose of my book is to familiarise the reader with my work – the work of the Kuleshov group.

I will not deal with the state of this method at the present day, but rather with how that method developed and into what forms it was shaped. The fact is the work which my group and I carried out in cinematography began eleven or twelve years ago, and only in recent years, thanks to the Revolution, thanks to changes in production organisation, did it become possible for us to attain meaningful results.

At first, these came with great difficulty, and I consider it necessary to mark all these stages through which our work developed.

Toward the beginning of the First World War Russian cinema had attained fairly great proportions; it began to produce merchandise, which went to the marketplace and gave a definite return.

Any number of people leaped into cinematography — actors, directors, scenarists, cameramen, all thirsty for easy earnings in a fresh field, but the film industry in Russia was so disorganised that people of questionable intent had sprung into it. Thus, film workers consisted of a conglomeration of bandits, chiselers — people of very dubious enterprises and murky social positions, but most important — people bereft of any education whatsoever, who were inclined toward squeezing money out of cinematography but who were uninterested in its cultural advancement and growth.

What is more, film-makers became obsessed with writing about their work in newspapers and magazines: some saying it was a real art, others that it was not, it was altogether nonsense, and so on.

Shallow articles and superficially enthusiastic reviews appeared. Even what seemed to be a critical controversy emerged, but it was completely lacking in seriousness.

And it was at that time that a group of people, interested as I was in serious cinematography, posed for itself a whole series of questions and took up their solution. Above all, we reminded ourselves that in order to determine just what cinematography was, it was necessary to ascertain those specific characteristics and those specific means of achieving an impression on the viewer, which were present only in cinema and no other art.

Let us say, if we are to begin examining any other form of art, such as music, for example, that we should find definite auditory content in it. Sounds abound in nature, and these sounds, this material, are transformed by composers into an ordered arrangement, placed into a prescribed relationship to each other (i.e., organised into a certain form) which is harmonic and rhythmic, and in this fashion, emerge as a musical work.

Similarly, it was quite clear to us what was done in painting: colour, too, has a material form and it is this being so in all other artistic crafts, it was just as possible to determine exactly the material of any given craft, the means of its refinement and the method of its organisation.

Yet, when we began to analyse the cinematographic picture, it was very difficult for us then to determine *what* emerged as its material, how this material was organised, what the integral, fundamental impression-making means of cinematography is, what sets cinematography apart from other forms of performance and other forms of artistic craft. But it was quite clear to us that film possesses its own particular means of influencing its viewers, since the effect of cinematography on the viewer was radically unlike the effect of other spectacles, it being inherent in film-craft alone.

We then began to analyse motion pictures and began to examine how they were constructed. In order to determine the main strength of cinematographic effect, we took one strip of

- 110 film, cut it according to its separate shots and began to discuss where and in what lay the very 'film-ness' which constitutes the essence of filmic construction.

Imagine, if you will, that we had taken a piece of film on which extraordinary actors in superb settings played out their magnificent scenes. The photographer had shot the scene very well. We projected the film onto a screen, and what did we see? We saw a living photograph of film actors, a living photograph of splendid set decor, a very beguiling setting, a well-conceived subject, beautiful photography, and so on. But not in a single one of these elements was cinematography. It became apparent that cinema is a specific thing, a photographic device demonstrates motion; while what I was discussing earlier has nothing in common either with the concept of cinematography or with the motion picture itself. We can see in this example that there are no specific methods or modes of affecting the viewer filmically. Having arrived at these rather cloudy conclusions – that what we had viewed was not cinematography, that it had no particular characteristic unique to it – we began to continue our investigation.

We went to various motion picture theatres and began to observe which films produced the optimum effect on the viewer and how these were made – in other words, by means of which films and which techniques of film-making the film was able to take hold of a viewer and therefore to bring to his awareness what we had conceived, what we had intended to show, and, thus, what we had intended to do. At that time, it was wholly unimportant for us to locate the source of cinematic impressionability, and we knew if we did discover this means, that we should be able to direct it where it was needed.

We began to analyse not only separate shots of a film but studied its entire construction. We took two films, for example – an American one and a comparable Russian one – and we saw that the difference between them was enormous. It became apparent that the Russian film was constructed of several very long shots, taken from one given position. The American film, on the other hand, at that time consisted of a large number of short shots taken from various positions, since it can be explained that for the price of admission the American viewer pays at the theatre, above all else, he wants to receive the maximum degree of impressions, the maximum degree of entertainment, and the maximum degree of action in return.

Thus, thanks to this commercial determinant of the American film, thanks to the very tempo of American life, much more accelerated than the tempo of Russian or European life, thanks to all this, what struck the eye watching the American films is that they consist of a whole series of very short shots, of a whole series of short sequences, joined in some determined order of

priority – as opposed to the Russian film, which at that time consisted of a few very long scenes, very monotonously following one another.

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Working further, on comparing an American film to a Russian one in order to test its effect on the viewer, we became convinced that the fundamental source of the film's impact on the viewer – a source present only in cinema – was not simply a showing of the content of given shots but the organisation of those shots among themselves, their combination and construction, that is, the inter-relationship of shots, the replacement of one shot by another. This is the fundamental means of the impact of film on the viewer.

The content of the shots in itself is not so important as is the joining of two shots of different content and the method of their connection and their alternation.

The joining of shots into a pre-determined order from which a film is made is technically called *montage*. For that reason we announced in 1916 that the basic source of the cinematographic impact on the viewer, that is, the means by which it was necessary for us to work prior to anything else (leaving for a given period all other cinematographic elements, perhaps – for several years ahead) is *montage*, that is, the alternation of shots among themselves.

Montage is the organisation of cinematic material.

Hence, it became utterly clear to us that separate shots, separately connected pieces of the film, still did not constitute cinematography, but only the material for cinematography. We knew, of course, that for the preparation of this material it would be necessary to apply the strictest demands and that extremely intense work would be needed in order that the quality of this material be of the highest order. But then we did not find the time for this, since everything was so filled with theatricality, a false approach to cinema, that it was temporarily necessary to set aside work on the actual material, to label it extraneous for the moment, for the given time, and to direct all our attention and our labour toward the organisation of material, toward the organisation of the film, that is, towards montage.

For these reasons, we then proclaimed something that was not entirely accurate, namely, that it was not important *how* the shots were made, but *how* these shots were assembled, how the motion picture was assembled. Let the material be wretched; the only important thing is that be well organised.

At the time that was a definite political step. Otherwise, it would have proved impossible to bridge the gap in those minds upon which our work depended, because they were simply unable to grasp the grand scale in one swoop. We were unable to gain victory on all fronts at once. The basic battle of our cinematographic faction, we announced, was the battle for montage, a

112 battle for the very basis of cinema, and not for separate shots nor for the material, which took a secondary place and which were necessary to study in their turn.

Short montage was then called American montage; long montage – Russian.

Moreover, by means of constructing their films according to the principle of rapid montage, the Americans produced effects never before seen by us. This consisted of the following. Let us visualise such a scene: a person sitting in a room at a desk begins to think black thoughts, decides to shoot himself, takes a pistol from the desk drawer, puts it to his temple, presses the trigger, the pistol fires – the man falls.

In Russia the scene was shot in the following way: the camera was set-up, the set decor placed in front of the camera, and it was reasoned thus: the man lives in a room, therefore it is necessary to build a room. It doesn't make sense to build four walls – let's build three. In the room we must have windows and doors. There must be wallpaper in a room, and flowers on the wallpaper – let's paper the walls. There are paintings hung on the walls. There are flowers placed on the windowsills. There must be a chest and a stove. All this we place in the room. The desk is decorated with writing implements, just as it would be in reality.

An actor sits at the desk, imagines that he is feeling terribly despondent, takes a pistol from the desk drawer, brings it to his temple and fires. The cameraman films this entire scene, develops it, prints it, projects it onto the screen; and when the viewer looks at the screen, he sees, at once, the drapes on the windows, the paintings on the wall, and so on. He sees a tiny actor among a large assortment of things, and during the time the actor performs the juiciest psychological suffering, the viewer might examine the leg of the writing desk or the painting which is hung on the wall – that is, the spectator receives an extraordinarily fragmented account of what is taking place on the screen.

The Americans filmed things completely differently: they divided each separate scene into montage sequences, into a series of sequences that made up each scene. In addition, they shot each separate moment in such a way that only what determined its action was visible, only what was categorically essential. Even in long shots they constructed scenery so that details were not apparent. If they needed to achieve the impression of a room, they would achieve it by some simple detail. If the wallpaper design did not have a working function, walls were darkened, were blackened, and only those objects were left in the light which were essential to a given event.

Besides that, they shot all their scenes in what is called close-up; that is, when it was necessary to show the face of a person suffering, they showed only the face. If the person were opening the drawer of a desk and taking a pistol from it, they showed the

desk drawer and the hand taking the pistol. When it came to pressing the trigger, they filmed the finger pressing on the trigger, because the remaining subjects and the surroundings in which the actor worked were irrelevant at that particular instant. This method of filming only that moment of movement essential to a given sequence and omitting the rest was labelled the 'American method of shooting' by us, and it was thus placed in the foundations of the new cinematography which we were beginning to form.

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Consequently, before beginning our experimental work and attaining any new results, we announced our working slogan which was contained in the following: 'Separate sequences of the film constitute cinematic material. Since we do not have any opportunity to work on the content of the film material, we proclaim that for a period of time content will virtually cease to exist for us, and it will be irrelevant for us what it consists of. For the present we are working on the method of organisation of the given material, that is, on montage, since montage is the main source of power of cinematic effectiveness. That effect is evident only in cinematography and the optimum impression is attained only through the montage, when that montage is not merely of ordinary scenes, but scenes filmed by the American method of shooting, that is, comprised of scenes in which every given sequence shows what is essential for the viewer to perceive and shows them in the largest scale and clearest shots possible'.

These were the basic conditions which we set forth prior to beginning on our work. That was about ten or eleven years ago.

Now we are studying something entirely different in cinema. Yet, all that we are now concerned with germinated from these basic premises.

The method which I was just discussing yielded rather prodigious results: all that is well done in Soviet cinema is done by this method. All European and Soviet cinematography works according to this method. But while the Americans were the originators of it, now we, having developed and used that which was conceived by the Americans, are carrying the work to a new frontier — the frontier of cinematic culture. But if the basis of cinema's effective influence had not been in our hands, then, of course, we would never have been able to achieve any results, for not having mastered the material of film, we would have been unable to contribute anything.

What I am going to deal with now will, I think, appear simply amusing to everyone, it is so naive, so primitive, and so obvious. But at that time (and that time was rather recently) it seemed to be such 'incredible futurism' that a bitter battle was waged against it. And so, it was often necessary to discontinue our work because we were such formalistic revolutionaries. In my own case, it went so far that I had neither money in my house nor shoes to wear, and all this because I was developing a particular cine-

114 matic principle which was in no way acceptable to the habitués of cinema.

The primary property of montage, which is now perfectly clear to everyone, but which had to be defended rabidly and with inordinate energy then, consists in the concept that montage creates the possibility of parallel and simultaneous actions; that is, that action can be simultaneously taking place in America, Europe, and Russia; that three, four, or five story lines can be edited in parallel, and yet in the film they would be gathered together.

All the fundamental principles of montage which I shall discuss were first used by me in the film *Engineer Prite's Project* (1917-18). In shooting *Engineer Prite's Project* we were put to considerable difficulty. It was necessary that our leading characters, a father and his daughter, walk across a meadow and look at a pole from which electrical cables were strung. Due to technical circumstances, we weren't able to shoot this at one location. We had to shoot the pole at one location and separately shoot the father and daughter at another. We shot them looking upward, talking about the pole and walking on. And we inter-cut the shot of the pole taken in another place into the walk across the meadow.

It became apparent that through montage it was possible to create new earthly terrains that did not exist anywhere, for these people did not walk there in reality, and in reality there was no pole there. But from the film it appeared that these people walked across a meadow and the pole appeared before their eyes.

A few years later I made a more complex experiment: we shot a complete scene. Khokhlova is walking along the Petrov Street in Moscow near the 'Mostorg' store. Obolensky is walking along the embankment of the Moscow River – at a distance of about two miles away. They see each other, smile, and begin to walk toward one another. Their meeting is filmed at the Boulevard Prechistensk. This boulevard is in an entirely different section of the city. They clasp hands, with Gogol's monument as a background, and look – at the White House! At this point, we cut-in a segment from an American film – *The White House in Washington*. In the next shot they are once again on the Boulevard Prechistensk. Deciding to go further, they leave and climb up the enormous staircase of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. (Once the greatest cathedral in Russia, standing opposite the Moscow Art Museum and the present Lenin Library, it was razed on Stalin's orders to make space for the Palace of the Soviets, which was never erected; a large open-air swimming pool now stands in its place. R.L.) We film them, edit the film, and the result is that they are seen walking up the steps of the White House. For this we used no trick, no double exposure: the effect was achieved solely by the organisation of the material by means of its cinematic treatment. This particular scene demonstrated the incredible power of montage, which actually appeared so great it was able to alter the very essence of the

material. From this scene, we came to understand that the basic strength of cinema lies in montage, because with montage it becomes possible both to break down and re-construct, and ultimately to re-make, the material.

Now to proceed: after we shot this scene, at the time of editing, we found we were missing one piece — we did not have the meeting between Khokhlova and Obolensky, who were no longer available by that time. So we took Obolensky's and Khokhlova's overcoats — and, against the background of Gogol's Monument, shot two other people's hands being clasped in greeting. We intercut a shot of these hands, and because we had shown Obolensky and Khokhlova prior to this shot, the substitution remained absolutely unnoticeable.

This brought a second experiment to my mind. In the first one we had created an arbitrary earthly terrain; along a single line of movement we created an arbitrarily earthly background. In the second experiment we let the background and the line of movement of the person remain the same, but we interchanged the people themselves. I shot a girl sitting before a mirror, painting her eyelashes and brows, putting on her lipstick, putting on her shoes.

By montage alone we were able to depict the girl, just as in nature, but in actuality she did not exist, because we shot the lips of one woman, the legs of another, the back of a third, and the eyes of a fourth. We spliced the pieces together in a predetermined relationship and created a totally new person, still retaining the complete reality of the material. This particular example likewise demonstrated that the entire power of cinematic effect is in montage. One can never achieve such unique, seemingly incredible things with the material alone. This is impossible in any other spectacle excepting cinema, in addition to which none of this is achieved through tricks but solely by the organisation of the material, solely by bringing the material together into this or that order. Let us take a simpler test: a person stands near the door. This is filmed in long-shot. Next, we go to a close-up, and in the close-up the head of another person is photographed. In this way, you can splice the face of A. Khokhlova with the body of Nata Vakhadze, and again this will not be through trick photography but montage — that is, by the organisation of the material, rather than by a technical gimmick.

After we had obtained such real achievements, after we felt a particular strength within ourselves, we established two other things. Before this, we had an argument about whether or not a particular psychological state which an actor expresses is dependent on montage. There were those who said that here is something which could not be altered by montage. We had a particular dispute with a certain famous actor to whom we said: Imagine this scene: a man, sitting in jail for a long time, is starving because he is not given anything to eat; he is brought a plate of soup, is delighted

Imagine another scene: a man in jail is given food, fed well, full to capacity, but he longs for his freedom, for the sight of birds, the sunlight, houses, clouds. A door is opened for him. He is led out onto the street, and he sees birds, clouds, the sun and houses and is extremely pleased by the sight. And so, we asked the actor: Will the face reacting to the soup and the face reacting to the sun appear the same on film or not? He answered us disdainfully: It is clear to anyone that the reaction to the soup and the reaction to freedom will be totally different.

Then we shot these two sequences, and regardless of how I transposed these shots and how they were examined, no one was able to perceive any difference in the face of this actor, in spite of the fact that his performance in each shot was absolutely different. With proper montage, even if one takes the performance of an actor directed at something quite different, it will still reach the viewer in the way intended by the editor, because the viewer himself will complete the sequence and see what is suggested to him by the montage.

I saw this scene, I think, in a film of Razumny's: a priest's apartment, with a portrait of Nicholas II hanging on the wall; the city is being occupied by the Red Army; the frightened priest turns the portrait over, and on the reverse side of the portrait is a smiling face of Lenin. However, this is a portrait very familiar to me, a portrait in which Lenin was not smiling. But that spot in the film was so funny, and it was so uproariously received by the public that I myself, scrutinising the portrait several times, saw the portrait of Lenin as smiling! Especially intrigued by this, I obtained the portrait that was used and saw that the expression on the face in the portrait was serious. The montage was so edited that we involuntarily imbued a serious face with an expression characteristic of that playful moment. In other words, the work of the actor was altered by means of montage. In this way, montage has a colossal influence on the function of the material. It became apparent that it was possible to change the actor's work, his movements, his very behaviour, in either one direction or another, through montage.

When we began making our own films, constructed on this principle of montage, we were attacked with cries of: 'Have pity, you lunatic futurists! You show films comprised of the most minute segments. In the eyes of the viewer the result will be utter chaos. Segments jump one after another so quickly that it is thoroughly impossible to understand the action'. We listened to this and began to think what method we could adopt to combine shots so as to avoid these abrupt shifts and flashes. Let us say that in a given shot we have a moving train. Moreover, let us say it is swaying from the right to the left side of the screen, while in the final frame of the previous shot the train occupied

a position in the left-hand corner of the screen. However, in the first frame of the following shot, the new subject occupied a prominent position in the right-hand corner of the screen. If you splice these shots together, that visual leap from one side of the screen to the other will produce the sensation of an abrupt jump, will produce a nervous irritation which will disturb the viewer, not giving the impression of a smooth transition. Therefore, the direction of the last frame of the preceding shot and of the first frame of the successive shot must coincide; if they do not an abrupt jump necessarily takes place.

If one films a round object and inter-cuts it with a square one, then this should be borne in mind. If one shoots a close-up of a face but intercuts it with a face only slightly smaller, it should also be taken into account. Then, there will be no flashes and jumps. If this isn't taken into consideration the result will be a jumble irritating to the eyes.

\* \* \*

Let us now pass on to an analysis of cinematographic material. We have quickly considered the temporal category of the motion picture's structure; now let us move on to an analysis of the spatial category.

If we were to consider a chair painted by an artist on canvas, what is more — painted by the finest artist, using the very best colours, on imported canvas, with every detail painted most realistically — if you were to look at this conception of a chair, you would be full of praise, because the chair would have come out beautifully, looking very real indeed. Now let us attempt to photograph this painted chair on film. Then, let us take a real chair, let us put it into the an actual space, let us light it, and similarly photograph it.

If we were to compare these two chairs projected onto the screen we would see that the actual chair, if shot properly, would come out well. However, if we were to view the segment on which the chair conceived by the artist on canvas was filmed, we would see no chair there at all; we would see only the canvas, the texture of it, and the configuration of colour in various combinations — that is, we would see the material on which and with which the imaginary chair was created. It bears repeating that only real things emerge on the screen — that is, the inter-relationship of various colours, the canvas, the flat surface — but the chair, as such, that chair found in three dimensional space, that chair, created by the artist on canvas, will not appear on the screen.

It becomes perfectly clear from this example that, before anything else, real things in real surroundings constitute cinematic material; stylised material, the stylised representation of a chair will not come out in cinema.

118 Further: Let us say you film, for instance, an autumn landscape: there is a ramshackle cabin, clouds in the sky, and a small stream nearby. Alongside this you shoot a railroad bridge. Having examined both these pieces of film on the screen, you will see that, in order to analyse it, you need a great deal of footage, since everything in it is somewhat slanted, somewhat affected, and there are far too many different objects in it.

Therefore, if you construct a certain movement upon the screen along a straight line parallel with the top and bottom sides and along a straight line parallel to the right and left sides, that is, perpendicular to the previous one, joining all the little quadrates, then all the directions will be extremely clear and plain to you and a very small amount of film will be needed for them. If crooked lines are introduced into this given grid, on the basis of the given movement, the crooked lines will likewise be easy to apprehend. The more complicated the construction of the grid, however, the more it will confuse — the greater will be the energy and time expended on that which is shown on the screen. That is why a railroad bridge or a cityscape, constructed on clearly delineated patterns, is read more clearly and distinctly than a landscape with clouds, trees, water, grass, houses, etc, because the lines of a house are somewhat crooked, a cloud is neither round nor square, the form of all this is so indefinite that one has to spend a great deal of time in order to read the screen clearly and distinctly. In the final analysis, you will not come away with the same impression from this landscape as you would, for instance, from a view of a bullet fired from a pistol. The (cinematic) shot should act as a sign, as a letter of the alphabet, so that you can instantly read it, and so that for the viewer what is expressed in the given shot will be utterly clear. If the viewer begins to get confused, then the shot does not fulfil its function — the function of a sign or letter. I repeat, each separate shot must act as a letter in a word — but a complex type of letter, for instance, a Chinese character. The shot is a complete conception, and it must be read instantly from beginning to end.

Arising from these circumstances, we issued a timely announcement, that: owing to the technique of film actors being completely distinct from that of theatre actors, and because film requires real material and not an acting of reality — owing to this, not theatre actors, but, as well call them, actor-mannequins. (N.B.— This rather inelegant combinatory term seems to approximate most closely the original Russian and Kuleshov's intent.) should act in films — that is, people who, in themselves, as they were created . . . present some kind of interest for cinematic treatment. That is, a person with a character-filled exterior, with a definite, brightly expressive character, could be such a cinematic actor-mannequin. A person simply with an ordinary, normal exterior, however, good-looking he may be, is not needed in the cinema.

In film everything is constructed on established inter-relationships, of people with varied characters. In order that a film actor justify what he does, he must have an appearance that corresponds. No good actor can really be made to remodel himself, to make himself over into another type, since, in film, no make-up, no costuming will really work. No short man can be made tall, no thin man made fat. Therefore, it is quite clear that a motion picture must be made from the start with that group of chosen people who represent themselves as interesting material for cinematic treatment.

These actor-mannequins who are to work in acted features cannot simply perform the jobs as posed by the scenario. They must play their roles in the finest, most organised method. Everything they do, all their working processes, must be precise, clear, and plain, convincing, and optimally organised, because otherwise they cannot be well apprehended on the screen.

I shall give another example, which I have frequently observed in film school. When a person waiting to prepare himself to be a film actor comes in and he is told that the room is hot — open a window — he begins to imagine heat, approaches an imaginary window, acts as if he is opening a window, and so on. . . . He is unable to perform a simple, real task — to take hold of a real window and open it, what is more, to do this with the maximum ease, maximum simplicity, as any other task, which should be done in the most efficient possible way. Occasionally, a characteristic mannerism which defines a given type of work is added, but even this is done by physical means and not by acting — for example, by movement along angular lines or flowing ones, but the actual plan of the disposition of a given work must still come in an organised form.

Now I return to what I began with. All these considerations gave birth to our school for cinematic training of people. Before anything else, in order to teach a film actor-mannequin to move in an organised manner, to control his own physical organism, and ultimately, to fulfil any given task — in order to take into account the entire mechanism of work, the entire mechanics of movement — we divided the person into his component parts. The point is that the quantum of human movements is as limitless as the quantum of sounds in nature. In order to play any musical composition, it is enough to have a definite organised range — a system of sounds, upon which an entire musical system can be based. In the same way we can create some sort of system of human movements, on which any movement can then be based.

We divided man into basic articulations (movements).

We examined the movement of limbs as movements along three axes, along three basic directions, as, for instance, the head as the articulation of the neck.

A movement along the first axis was the movement of the head

- 120 to the right, to the left. This gesture corresponds to negation. A movement along the second axis – up and down – is a gesture corresponding to assent.

A movement along the third axis was a tilting of the head toward the shoulder.

The eyes have one axis along which they move to the left or right and another for upward and downward movements; unfortunately they do not have a third axis, and the rotation of the eyes around is a combination of the first and second axes.

The collar bone (clavicle) has the movement of the shoulder as its first axis – forward and backward, on the second axis – upward and downward, and on the third axis – the movement of ‘twisting’ and ‘turning’.

Then come the other bodily parts: the elbow, the hand, the fingers; then the waist and the leg – the rib, knee, and foot. If a person is to move on all these fundamental axes of his bodily parts, and their combinations, his movements can be recorded, and if his movements clearly express these combinations of axial movements, they can easily be apprehended on the screen, and a person working can take his work into account at all times and will know what he is about.

As an actor considers his work in relation to his environment, so must that environment be correspondingly taken into account. The environment in which an actor works is a pyramid, the top of which converges to the centre of the lens. (Note: Kuleshov does not here make clear that he intends this imaginary pyramid to be conceived as if it were on its side, with the apex of the pyramid being at the lens and with the pyramid’s base representing the rectangle of the frame.) This space – which is taken by the lens at angles of  $45^{\circ}$ - $50^{\circ}$ - $100^{\circ}$  and which must be fitted onto a rectangular screen – can be divided into those basic grids (quadrates), squares, which provide an outline for movement with such precision, that they occupy a very clear and easily decipherable position in terms of the rectangular screen.

If a person works along clearly expressed axes of his mechanism, and movement along these axes is distributed within the space allocated on the screen – in the ‘spatial grid’ – you will get the maximal clarity, maximal purity in the work of the actor-mannequin. You will read everything he does on the screen as clearly as in a mirror.

If a whole series of labour processes needs to be performed, each of those actions must be optimally organised, and to organise it is very simple. Thanks to the presence of the grid and also thanks to the presence of the axes in the human mechanism. In order for a person to learn how to operate, without thinking about it, along his axes and by a given grid, there is a special set of exercises, a special kind of training, which brings one into a condition similar to that produced in training to drive an auto-

mobile. The whole secret to driving a car lies in its being driven automatically; that is, one doesn't consciously think about when it is necessary to shift gears, as all of this done mechanically and instinctively. . . . The qualified film actor, whose entire technique is calculated to give a comfortable reading of his screen performance, is the result of precisely this same sort of training.

Working along these axes, it is vital to remember that the entire effect in film is a series of labour processes. The whole secret of the scenario is contained in the author's creating a series of labour processes; to wit, even the act of pouring tea or kissing is a labour process, in that in both of these acts there is a determined set of mechanics.

I must repeat: only organised work (action) comes out successfully in cinema.

I must repeat: the actor-mannequin who cannot alter his appearance by the manipulation of his muscles is not sufficiently cinematically trained; such an actor is not suitable for work in film.

\* \* \*

The film shot – is not a still photograph. The shot is a sign, a letter (character) for montage. The change in normal point of view ought to be used by the director with an awareness of the work of the shot as a sign. A proud person may be shot from a low angle – the foreshortening will stress, will help to highlight the essential emphasis on pride. A lowly, dispirited person may be shot from a high angle – the dispiritedness will be emphasised by the point of view of the camera. For example – the work of Pudovkin in *Mother*.

A poet places one word after another, in a definite rhythm, as one brick after another. Cemented by him, the work-images produce a complex conception as a result.

So it is that shots, like conventionalised meanings, like characters in the Chinese alphabet, produce images and concepts. The montage of shots is the construction of whole phrases. Content is derived from shots. It is better still if the scenarist produces the content by determining the character of the material of the shot. The director expresses the conception of the scenarist by a montage of shot-signs.

With an introduction by Peter Wollen

*Mayakovsky was fascinated by the cinema all his life. His sister describes how, when he was a teen-ager, 'the cinema attracted him most of all; in one evening he was capable of sitting through three different programmes one after another. Because he was short of money, he would sometimes sneak in without paying and often get into trouble for this. But he would sacrifice everything for the cinema'. He wrote his first script in 1913, soon after he had come in contact with the Futurists for the first time. It was about a Futurist poet (Mayakovsky had a constant tendency to write himself into films as the hero) and never got made. The same year he appeared in an independent Futurist film with a number of other poets and painters and also wrote his first film criticism, which concentrated on attacking the theatre and theatre-based movies.*

*Mayakovsky's next wave of interest and activity in the cinema came immediately after the Revolution. In 1918 Mayakovsky wrote and starred in three movies for a private film company, Neptune. The first, an adaptation of Jack London's novel Martin Eden, shifted from California to Moscow with the hero changed into a Futurist poet. The second was another adaptation, of an Italian story about a delinquent who falls in love with a school-teacher and gets killed in a gang fight defending her honour. The producers insisted on a religious ending which Mayakovsky managed to get cut out later when the industry was nationalised. The third project, Shackled by Film, was the most ambitious; it is the first version of Heart of the Screen, which is printed here, but less critical of the movie industry and more traditionally romantic in its conception of the love between the hero (an artist rather than a sign painter) and the star, played by Lily Brik.*

*Mayakovsky was dissatisfied with all the Neptune films. They were written and made in two weeks each and the director, Turkin, was out of sympathy with Futurism in general and Mayakovsky in particular. He showed no interest in the experiments which Mayakovsky wanted to introduce — 'Having familiarised myself with the technical side of film-making, I wrote a script on a par with our innovative literary work. The production by Neptune made a shameful mess of it'.*

*Mayakovsky retreated from the cinema again after this experience, though he did write a polemical article, Cinema and Cinema, in 1922, attacking the capitalist cinema for which he had worked and hailing a new revolutionary cinema, which would spell the end of the old commercial spectacle, destroy aesthetics and root out emotions and plots to replace them with ideas and with reality. He worked briefly with Lunacharsky on plans to reorganise the*

nationalised film industry, but did no actual film work. Then in 1927 he was invited to write a number of scripts for VUFKU, the Ukrainian state film company. He wrote nine, of which only two were produced, both after re-writing by others. Heart of the Screen (not made) was one of this series and also How Are You?, which Mayakovsky himself thought the most important. He himself described its reception at Sovkino, where he read the scenario:

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*The assembly listened gloomily. Comrade Yefremov rushed away (ill?) at the beginning of the second part.*

*Afterwards, discussion. I can only report the essence of this from my own notes; unfortunately no stenographic record was made of this proud occasion, inspiring the entertainment industry to new heights.*

*Comrade Trainin: I know of two types of scenario; one deals with the cosmos in general, the other – with man in the cosmos. The scenario we've heard conforms to neither type. To speak of it at once is difficult, but it seems clear that it passes the ideological test.*

*Comrade Shvedchikov: Art is a reflection of reality. This scenario does not reflect reality. We don't need it. Orientate yourself to The Tailor From Torzhok. This is an experiment and we have to be self-supporting.*

*Comrade Yefremov (who came back as Trainin began his speech): Never in all my life have I heard such nonsense.*

*The Comrade Secretary looked around the circle of executives and then took the floor: The scenario will not be understood by the masses!*

*Comrade Kuleshov (while the discussion goes on): How can you talk with such people? See what I mean? After their speeches my head will ache for two weeks!*

*The scenario is not accepted by Sovkino.*

After this experience (*How Are You?* had been through three drafts and was to have been directed by Kuleshov) Mayakovsky gave up writing for the cinema, though he intervened polemically in debate, denouncing Sovkino for underestimating the masses and considering them fit for nothing better than costume epics. He consistently supported experimental and newsreel directors, such as Esther Shub. In 1928, during his visit to Paris, he wrote Lily Brik that 'of the arts, I can stand to look at only movies – there I go every day'. One of his last projects, *Moscow is Burning* is a kind of tribute to the cinema, which contains not only simultaneous three-screen projection, but episodes modelled directly on the cinema – Shub, Eisenstein and American chase and slapstick movies. Cinema struck Mayakovsky as the most modern and contemporary art and he approached it as a modernist. It influenced his own work enormously: plays like *The Bath-house* and *The Bedbug* were both based on rejected scripts, his poems were influenced stylistically

124 by his scenarios. It is a tragedy he never had the chance to influence the movies, by getting his scripts made as he wanted, even or at all. Today, when directors and critics are turning back more and more to Russian cinema of the twenties, we can learn from Mayakovsky as we can from Eisenstein or Dziga Vertov: like them he was not just a revolutionary movie-maker but also a theorist interested in the nature of film.

## HOW ARE YOU?

### A Day in Five Movie Details

#### Prologue:

1. A street. An ordinary man walking – Mayakovsky. Panorama.
2. Panorama from the other direction. Continuation of Mayakovsky's movement against the same background – the same houses.
3. People
4. Automobiles
5. Trams
6. Buses
- the background for Mayakovsky walking.
7. A second man, almost identical with the first, walking.
8. He walks almost identically, waving his arms like a windmill.
9. A hand.
10. Repeat of shots one through six.
11. {
12. } The first ordinary man walking – the second walking.
13. (Intercut montage, preparing their meeting.)
14. }
15. Mayakovsky stops, looks intently, begins to wave and walks on.
16. The second Mayakovsky catches sight of him, pauses, looks intently, continues walking too.
17. The first Mayakovsky extends his hand.
18. The second Mayakovsky extends his hand.
19. Hand hits hand, water splashes in all directions from between the palms.
20. The two stand, motionless, with hands clasped, like a provincial photograph. They stand for a very long time (photographically). Movement in the background continues exaggeratedly.
21. The first changes the immobile expression on his face to a smile using only his lips.
22. The second changes his immobile expression to a smile using only his lips.
23. The first tears his hand away.
24. The second tears his hand away.
25. The first tips his hat.
26. The second tips his hat.
27. The collar of the first flips up with joy.
28. The moustaches of the second flip up.
29. Both wear expressions of maximum pleasure. From one mouth the letter 'H' jumps out. Immediately from the second's mouth form

the words: 'How are you?'

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(Title) 'How are you?'

30. They've come nose to nose, peering at one another tensely, awaiting an answer.

31. Both at once step back to the sides of the frame. Each extends a hand pointing into the depth of the frame.

32. Between the ends of their extended arms appear:

**Part One :**

(Title) All people, except the rich and the dead, meet the morning like this:

33. Black screen. A chalk drawing grows visible: a grandma drinks coffee, the coffee pot turns into a kitten. The kitten plays with a ball of string; strings extend from the ball — zigzags pointing with arrows to the forehead of the sleeping Mayakovsky (he gradually appears in outline).

34. A bed. Mayakovsky is in the bed. Beyond the bed, the background turns into the sea.

35. The sea. The ball of the sun rises from beyond the horizon.

36. Clouds cover the sun. One ray pierces the clouds.

37. Across the black screen, the ray, narrow at the window and growing wider towards the bed, gradually gets stronger.

38. In the ray of light part of a man lying in bed can clearly be seen.

39. In the ray of light — pedestrians stamping and walking off.

40. Footsteps.

41. The bed shakes from the footsteps.

42. Mayakovsky turns on his other side in bed.

43-50. In the ray of light are seen solitary automobiles and trucks, delivering food.

51. The bed shakes harder. Mayakovsky turns on his other side.

52-55. In the ray of light the full commotion of the city with trams, cars, trucks, pedestrians.

56. Mayakovsky tosses back and forth in bed.

57-61. One after another, automobile horns, tram bells, steamship sirens and factory whistles sound.

62. The room has grown light. Mayakovsky opens his eyes a little, raises his watch to one eye. The watch shows a quarter to eight.

63. The minute and second hands are almost squeezed up against the upper and lower lids. The hands spread apart, opening the eye. (In all the watch's actions, the watch should appear as realistic as possible, and only at the moment when the hands work, the watch face fades slightly.)

64. Mayakovsky leaps up, opens the door a little and roars through the crack.

65. The crack. Mayakovsky's room. From his mouth leap the letters: (Title) 'Newspaper!'

66. The letters of the word spread through the room and the hall, bounce into the kitchen, and one by one settle on the head of the cook who is preparing the samovar and disappear into her head.

67. Mayakovsky plugs in an electric tea pot.

68-69. The cook tears herself from her place and trudges down the stairs.

- 126 70. Mayakovsky enters his room, wiping his hands and face as he goes.
71. The cook stops before a newspaper kiosk.  
(Title) The universe on paper.
72. The newsvendor gives the cook several newspapers.
73. The cook loads her basket of food, crowned by the newspapers, on her right shoulder and walks off.
74. Two komsomols stop at the news stand. They take a paper. Their eyes quickly scan the page looking for the short lines of verses. They shrug.  
(Title) 'Again no verses. What a dull newspaper.'
- 75-80. The cook strides along. The newspapers on her shoulder grow: they weigh down on the cook. The houses in the cook's background gradually shrink. The cook becomes really tiny. The houses appear even smaller. On the cook's shoulder - a huge globe of the world. She walks, hardly able to move her feet under the weight.
81. The street in perspective. The tram rails pointed at the camera. In the distance, the sphere of the earth appears rolling towards the camera - the globe quickly grows.
82. The entrance to Mayakovsky's house. The door opens by itself. The globe rolls up to the door. It shrinks until it is small enough to fit through the door.
83. Inside the door, it rolls up the stairs by itself.
84. The door of an apartment with the nameplate: 'Brik. Mayakovsky'. From the door the cook appears with her groceries and newspapers.
- 85-86. Through the crack in the door, a hand gives Mayakovsky, who is busy washing his razor, a newspaper. He takes it and sits down at his desk.
87. Mayakovsky turns his head, looks.
88. A detail of his desk.
89. A radio tower.
90. Mayakovsky unfolds the newspaper.
91. Out of the page of the newspaper - a train rushes at the camera.
- 92-93. Details of a steam engine in motion.
94. Mayakovsky dodges away from the newspaper a little. He goes to the window and opens it.
95. A plane flying.
- 96-97. Details of a plane in motion.
98. Mayakovsky at the desk. He spreads the newspaper out completely.
99. Mayakovsky's eyes.
100. A detail of the newspaper: editorial - 'Our export, bread.'
101. A line drawing of a man climbs out of the frame of the editorial, straightens his *pince nez*, and, standing on a line of type as at a rostrum, jumps out of the newspaper.
102. He grabs Mayakovsky's hand; he shakes with the effort of trying to persuade. Quotations and statistics pour out of his mouth.
103. Statistics fly into the ear of the listening Mayakovsky and raise a whirlwind over his head
- 104-106. Mayakovsky begins to shrink away, to yawn and hem and

haw: 'I know, I know.' Finally he places a calm and good-natured hand on the shoulder of the editor and chases him back into the newspaper page. 127

107. Mayakovsky turns the page. He reads on.

108. Mayakovsky's eyes open wide; he falls back in his chair and looks around the room.

109. The things on the desk start to shake.

110. The lamp shatters.

111. The calendar falls into a pile of separate sheets. On the desk, bits and pieces of newspaper letters form the phrase: 'Earthquake in Leninakan'. Mayakovsky fixes his eyes on the lines of the newspaper; his hands and shoulders tremble. He listens.

112. He turns around.

113. The teapot boiling.

114. Mayakovsky takes the teapot, puts it on the desk amidst the fragments of letters. The teapot whistles and shakes, rising as though in imitation of an erupting volcano. Mayakovsky looks at the boiling water, smiles, gathers the fragments and rolls them up in a sheet of newspaper. The newspaper straightens out and becomes a normal newspaper again.

115. Mayakovsky reads further.

116. 'The growth of bureauc . . .' A little head with a pen behind its ear pokes out of the 'u'. Catching hold of the newspaper border with his mits, he crawls out, grows and brandishes pens and pencils.

117. Mayakovsky retreats before him, then attacks, grabs him by the throat, chokes him and with difficulty chases him back into the newspaper.

118-119. Mayakovsky pours the tea; after blowing on it, he takes a swallow and looks at the paper: 'Accidents'. Accidents.

120. He sits down, breathing heavily. He straightens his crumpled tie. He reads.

121. 'Attempted suicide . . . Yesterday at 6 o'clock a young woman, 22 years old, with a shot from a revolver . . . condition hopele . . '

122. The newspaper floats up and stands at an angle like a huge partition.

123. From the dark corner of the newspaper, the figure of a young woman emerges; in despair, she raises her hand with a revolver in it. The revolver to her temple, she touches the trigger.

124. Tearing through the sheet of newspaper, like a dog in the circus when it leaps through a paper-covered hoop, Mayakovsky bursts into the room formed by the newspaper.

125. He tries to grab and pull away the hand with the revolver, but it is too late — the girl falls to the floor.

126. Mayakovsky steps back. Horror on his face.

127. Mayakovsky in his room. He crumples the newspaper, carelessly pushes his tea aside and falls back in his chair.

128. Slowly Mayakovsky's face becomes calm. He turns his eyes to the newspaper again.

129. 'Announcements.'

(Title) 'To dress yourself, you can't ask for more than the "Moscow-stitch" clothing store.'

130. In the corner hangs a miserable scrap of human clothing.

128 Wadding hangs out of the lining. The collar is threadbare. Mayakovsky picks up the coat with two fingers and spreads out the holes so he can see them.

131. 'Announcement.' 'To dress yourself, you can't ask for more . . . ' The street. Along the street, independently, without people inside, march smoothly pressed, brand new coats and three piece suits: pants, jackets and vests, and, instead of a head, each one has a tag with a steep price.

132. The prices flit by.

133. Pensively Mayakovsky moves his lips, adding and computing.

134. The flitting prices stop, draw even with one another and form one huge sum.

135. The sum turns into a wad of ruble notes.

136. The wad of notes rustles before his eyes.

137. Mayakovsky stands up and stares pensively.

138. Before him a book of verses swings into view all by itself, to the side of the frame opposite the notes. The book settles and new books pile on top of it.

139. Between the verses and the notes appear two pens which turn into a white equal sign.

140. Mayakovsky grabs the equal sign-posts.

(Title) 'Not to work is impossible.'

End of first part.

#### Part Two:

1. Mayakovsky is sitting by the window, sharpening a pencil with a razor blade.

2. He takes aim and brandishes the sharpened pencil in the direction of the window.

(Title) 'Let there be verses!'

3. A piggy-looking family sits drinking tea.

4. Close-up of the closely shaven father.

(Title) 'I don't need verses!'

5. Komsomol boys and a girl in moonlight. The Komsomol girl moves away from the others, dreamily demanding :

(Title) 'Let there be verses!'

6. Papa's collar is coming off, and in addition his beard and the pelt on the paw with which he grips his tea glass are growing out.

(Title) 'I don't need verses!'

7. The Komsomols at a news stand.

(Title) 'Let there be verses!'

8. Transformed into an orangutan before our eyes, the father :

(Title) 'I don't need your verses!'

9. A poster. Battle of the poets: Aseev, Kirsanov, Mayakovsky, Pasternak.

10. Workers' university hall, audience rising to its feet, applauding.

11. Mayakovsky stands up and looks around.

12. Decisively, Mayakovsky rolls up his sleeves.

13. Mayakovsky wets his pencil.

14. Mayakovsky aims at a piece of paper with his pencil.

(Title) 'Factory without smoke and stacks.'

15. He rubs his forehead. Movement with his hand, like turning a dial.

16. Letters start flying out of his head and soaring around the room.

17. Mayakovsky jumps about, catching the letters on his pencil.
18. Mayakovsky spills the letters off the pencil, like pretzels off a pole, and with difficulty fastens them to the paper.
19. The flying letters form into hackneyed phrases and fly apart again.
20. For a moment phrases such as these hang in the air: 'How fine, how fresh were the roses,' 'The ladybird knows not,' etc.
21. Mayakovsky tears letter from letter, grabs and selects the ones he needs.
22. He plants them on the paper again.
23. Mayakovsky admires what he's written.
24. In fat letters on the sheet of paper: 'Left, Left, Left!'
25. Mayakovsky at the window with a sharpened pencil, decisive and smiling.
26. He gathers the pencil shavings in a piece of paper and throws them out the window. He adjusts the ventilator in the window.
27. He gets a piece of paper from the desk and smooths it out lovingly.
28. The ventilator whirls.
29. The ventilation pipe sucks out the over-worked rhymes: dove-love-above, steeple-people, flight-night, etc.
30. Mayakovsky completes his poem, signs it and gets up, satisfied. (Title) Enthusiasm 'swept him off his feet,' as they say.
31. Glowing with hope, Mayakovsky rolls what he has written into a cylinder, ties it with a ribbon and
32. goes down the stairs, not touching the steps with his feet.
- 33-35. He goes along the street making huge leaps, his legs crossed and motionless. He is two heads higher than the other people on the street. Passers-by turn around. The tails of his coat, carried by the wind, render him a demonic figure.
36. Mayakovsky in an editor's waiting room. Next to him sits a whole series of identical visitors with the exact same rolled piece of paper and the same ribbon.
37. Mayakovsky is called in.
38. Mayakovsky enters the editor's office. Entering, he grows until he occupies the entire door frame.
39. Mayakovsky and the editor shake hands. Mayakovsky shrinks to the editor's size. The editor is a newspaper bureaucrat. He asks Mayakovsky to read.
- 40-42. From being the same size, the editor grows smaller and smaller - becoming quite tiny. Mayakovsky approaches him with his manuscript, growing to huge proportions, four times larger than the editor. A tiny chess pawn sits on the editor's chair.
43. The poet reads with an auditorium as background.
44. Having listened, the editor returns to normal size. He swallows the manuscript, makes an angry face and walks toward the poet. Mayakovsky grows small. The editor grows huge, four times the size of the poet. The poet sits like a tiny pawn on a minute chair.
45. The editor criticises with the orangutan family as background.
46. The poet picks up a paper with the word 'Account' written on it.
47. The poet courageously approaches the editor, again growing in size, but not to such an extent as before.
48. Behind the poet - walk the Komsomols.

- 130 49. The editor grows to immense size. The little poet stands on his chair; the editor shoves a signed piece of paper into his hands.  
50. Behind the editor, the rejoicing orangutans.  
51. The editor writes: 'Ten rubles advance.'  
52. Mayakovsky leaves through the door, tiny, hardly noticeable over the door step.  
53. The poet stands in line with the others at the cashier.  
54. Over the cashier's window is a sign: 'The cashier will return sometime.'  
55. The poet begins to yawn.  
56. He dozes.  
57. The grille of the cashier's window becomes the railings of a southern terrace wound with flowers.  
58. The ventilator turns into a bird.  
59. Asleep. Mayakovsky knocks over the ink pot. Ink pours over the papers.  
60-61. Papers from the cashier's desk and the building merge and become the real Black Sea.  
62. Palm trees wave in the breeze.  
63. The end of a palm leaf caresses and tickles Mayakovsky's nose.  
64. Mayakovsky wakes up. The end of the cleaning lady's broom is under his nose.  
65. Mayakovsky walks along the street. He looks around.  
66. The shop window 'Moscowstitch'.  
67. Mayakovsky takes his watch out of his vest pocket, looks at the watch, holding it next to his stomach. 5.30. The hands are together. He puts the watch back in his pocket.  
68. The watch hands seem to pierce into the stomach. The hanging stomach contracts.  
69. Mayakovsky stops at the window of a bakery, takes out some change and weighs it in his hand.  
70-72. Mayakovsky enters the store and asks about the price. He buys a little package. Bread and sausage.

End of second part.

### Part Three:

(Title) Dry Bread.

1. In his room, Mayakovsky sits at his desk. He eats without appetite or pleasure, staring at the newspaper. He takes a piece of bread in his hand, and shoves it in his mouth. He can't chew it. He looks at the piece with dissatisfaction, frowns and throws it on the floor in disgust.
- (Title) 'How much work for a piece of bread!'
2. The slightly chewed piece of bread falls to the floor.
3. The editorial man climbs out of the newspaper, grabs the seated Mayakovsky by the arm and points to the floor with his free hand.
- (Title) 'So much work for a piece of bread!'
4. The hunk of bread lying on the floor.
5. The hunk jumps up and leaps into his hand.
6. From his mouth the bitten off piece rejoins the hunk of bread.
7. His hand puts the bread on the desk; the piece merges with the loaf.
8. Mayakovsky puts on his coat and moves backwards to the door.

9. Backwards, he goes down the stairs.
10. He goes along the street.
11. He enters the store.
12. He gives the loaf back.
13. He walks backwards to the cashier.
14. He receives his money back from the cashier.
15. He leaves the store.
16. The loaf climbs onto the shelf.
17. From the shelf, the loaf gets onto a pile of loaves.
18. The loaves go into the oven.
19. The loaves come out as dough.
20. The dough turns into flour.
21. The flour pours into a sack.
22. People carry the sack to the door, to a truck.
23. The sack is loaded on the truck.
24. The paper wrapping on the bread smoothes out.
25. The bread wrapping grows into a ream of paper.
26. The reams of paper are packed into a crate.
27. Crates pile up with other crates.
28. The crates pile onto a car.
29. The car drives backwards to a paper factory.
30. The truck with sacks of flour returns to a flour storehouse.
31. The flour is received at the storehouse.
32. The flour travels backwards to the flour mill.
33. The mill makes grain from the flour.
34. Peasants take away the grain in sacks.
35. The peasant carry the grain to the threshing-floor.
36. The grain collects itself into ears.
37. The ears tie together into sheaves.
38. The sheaves are carried to the field.
39. From under the sheaves, the rye straightens up.
40. Along a path through the rye, the young woman from the accidents column strolls arm in arm with Mayakovsky.
41. The rye starts to grow smaller.
42. The rye turns into shoots.
43. Ploughed earth.
44. The furrows grow shorter.
45. The peasant is tired.
46. People run out to him from the village.
- 47-49. The village attacked, in flames.
- 50-52. Partisans beat off the attack.
53. A city, full of demonstrating crowds.
- 54-56. On all the posters and flags : 'Bread and Peace.'  
(Diaphragm).
57. (Diaphragm reopens). Mayakovsky in his room with a cup of tea and a piece of bread.
58. The sketched editorial man shakes his hand and climbs into the newspaper.
59. Mayakovsky looks at the discarded piece.
60. Mayakovsky carefully picks up the piece.
61. Mayakovsky dusts the piece off.
62. Mayakovsky places the tough piece of bread in a fantastically ornate vase He cleans off the vase with his jacket and spreads out

132 his own handkerchief as a napkin for the bread. He steps back and admires.

End of third part.

Part Four :

(Title) Natural Love.

(Title) A rock.

1. Several ordinary peaceful rocks.

(Title) A swamp.

2. An ordinary peaceful swamp.

(Title) Chance.

3. A hand picks up a rock. .

4. It throws the rock into the water.

5. Regular circles in the swamp.

(Title) People.

6-8 In a room someone knocks over a candle. The candle sets fire to a curtain. Beyond the curtain the room is occupied.

9-11. The other room. People congratulate a bride and groom dressed in wedding attire.

(Title) Chance.

12. The house burns.

13-15. Firemen drive off to the fire.

16-17. People run out of the house.

18-20. People surround the house and walk in crowds around it.

21-24. In various apartments people put on their holiday clothes, reading their invitations to the wedding.

25-28. People leave their homes.

29-32. The wedding pair get into a carriage.

33-35. People in a carriage and in cars – follow the wedding. Pedestrians chase after the carriage.

36. The bride's home.

37. People constantly come and stare in the windows.

38. The guests drive up.

39. The city from above.

40-41. Circle of people around the burning house.

42-43. A circle around the house with the wedding.

(Title) A young woman from the wedding circle.

44. The circle around the wedding : in the middle of the crowd – a young woman, anxious and lonely.

(Title) A man from the fire circle.

45. Among those staring at the fire – Mayakovsky, curious and lonely.

(Title) The circles touch.

46-47. A circle (close-up) : part of the circle with the young woman and part of the circle with Mayakovsky.

48-49. The circles fit one on the other.

50. The young woman looks around at Mayakovsky. From the fire circle Mayakovsky looks around the young woman from the wedding circle. A fine figure of a girl.

51. The young woman leaves her circle.

52. Mayakovsky leaves his circle.

53. Mayakovsky hurries after the young woman. He looks at the young woman. In his eyes she becomes the one from the accidents

column.

54. He catches up with her.

(Title) 'But I'm not even going to talk to you.'

55. The young woman moves away, turns her face away from him a few times and shakes her head in disagreement.

56. Finally she joins in conversation.

(Title) 'But I'm not even going to walk with you, only two steps.'

57. He takes a step alongside her.

58. Then he takes her arm and they walk along together.

59-61. Along the way Mayakovsky picks a flower which has somehow sprouted through the pavement.

62. Mayakovsky stands before the gates to his house.

(Title) 'But you won't even drop in on me, only for a minute.'

63-69. All round it is winter, except in front of the very house where there is a little garden in bloom and trees with birds; the facade of the house is completely overgrown with roses. Sitting on a bench, wearing only his shirtsleeves, the yard-keeper wipes off his pouring sweat.

(Title) On wings of love.

70-72. Airplane wings grow on the young woman and Mayakovsky.

73-74. The young woman and Mayakovsky flutter up the stairs.

75-80. Each object in the dirty room bursts into bloom; lilies appear in the inkwell; before our eyes the simple pattern on the curtains turns into a rosebud pattern. The plain lamp becomes a chandelier.

81. Mayakovsky pours water from a pitcher.

(Title) 'But we won't even have anything to drink - only one glass.'

82. The young woman says:

(Title) 'What strong water you have!'

83-84. He takes her glass and slowly starts towards her.

(Title) 'But we won't even kiss.'

85. Their lips come together.

86-89. The facade of the house: the flowers fall off the wall, there is snow on the street. The yard-keeper in his shirt sleeves puts on a fur coat.

90-93. The room has returned to the norm of its usual dirty look.

94-96. They leave the house. He is wearing galoshes, she - worn down heels. They carry folded wings under their arms. They slip. They yawn.

97. After walking a few feet, Mayakovsky takes out his watch.

98-101. 22 minutes after nine. The arrows point in different directions. Mayakovsky shows the young woman the pointing arrows and says goodbye. They walk off in opposite directions.

End of fourth part.

#### Part Five:

(Title) Both Day and Night.

1-11. The intense workings of the central water works. Masses of water pouring out of filters. The veins of the water works. The water mains.

(Title) The destroyers of water.

12. A water tap, astounding in its frailness.

13. The kitchen. Mayakovsky filters water into the samovar.

(Title) The authorities on the spot.

- 134 14-16. The kitchen. A militiaman blissfully enjoying himself with the cook. He takes off his uniform.
- 17-18. Mayakovsky fans the flame in the samovar with a shoe.  
(Title) Both day and night.
- 19-27. The immense building of a telephone station. The constant work of the operators. The tangle of telephone wires.  
(Title) The wreckers of the telephone.
28. The frowsy mother of the family on the telephone. Behind the mother, in a line, the papa, a grown-up daughter, three little boys and two dogs. The telephone conversation:  
(Title) 'We're coming to visit you on the occasion of the eve of the anniversary of the birth of Robespierre.'
29. Mayakovsky on the telephone makes an amiable face, and says:  
(Title) 'Come on over! I'll put on the samovar.'
30. Mayakovsky throws down the receiver and mutters angrily:  
(Title) 'Get out of here – and we'll drink some tea . . .'
- 31-33. The family on the street.
- 34-35. Mayakovsky fans the samovar with a shoe – the fire won't catch. He takes the shoe from the samovar and puts it on his foot, takes the militiaman's boot and starts to fan with it.
36. The telephone.
37. A call from the organiser of a workers' university.
38. A crowd, thronging into the auditorium.
39. Mayakovsky on the telephone:  
(Title) 'I'll come, if I can get rid of them.'
40. The doorbell rings.
- 41-42. The family and a dog crowd in.
- 43-45. Mayakovsky seats the guests wearing a hypertrophied smile.
- 46-47. Mayakovsky serves them tea.
- 48-50. The seated guests amiably start in with amiable questions:  
(Title) The father: 'They say the price index for chitterlings is fluctuating again?'
- The daughter: 'Tell me, have you ever experienced ideal love?'
51. The son starts in with the dog:  
(Title) 'My dog is dithiplined: she pitheth not when she wanth, but when I wanth.'
52. The mother, in ecstasy:  
(Title) 'My Toto, don't you think, is a delight, so mature for his age?'
- 53-55. Mayakovsky answers each politely, but as soon as the person addressing him turns away, he grimaces hopelessly.
56. A packed-full auditorium.
57. Three organisers from the workers' university at the telephone.
58. Mayakovsky at the telephone.  
(Title) 'I have a meeting here.'
59. The guests have finished their tea.
60. Mayakovsky gets up, joyfully rubbing his hands together.
- 61-63. The guests thank him. But then they all sit down in a row on the couch, saying:  
(Title) 'It's so pleasant to sit a while here at your house – it relaxes the very soul.'
64. The auditorium in an uproar.
65. A crush at the telephone.
66. Mayakovsky waves aside the ringing telephone.

67. Mayakovsky runs out of the room.  
 68. Mayakovsky sobs in the kitchen, leaning against the kitchen table.  
 69. Mayakovsky raises his head.  
 70. On a nail hangs the uniform of the militiaman who is spending the night with the cook.  
 71. The guests relaxing blissfully on the couch.  
 72. A militiaman enters. He hands them a paper.  
 (Title) 'Sign for it.'  
 73. The confused guests take the paper and read it:  
 (Title) 'Notification from the Apartment Building Committee. Seismographic division. In view of the possibility of a repetition in Moscow of the Tokyo earthquake, it is proposed that the aforesaid night be spent outside the house – on the street.'  
 'Sign for it!'  
 74-76. The militiaman pokes at the paper. On the run, putting their hats on backwards, shoving one arm in their coats and scrawling their signatures with the other, the family vanishes, dragging their dog by its tail.  
 77. In his confusion, the husband says to the wife:  
 (Title) 'We really ought to say goodbye to our host . . .'  
 78. The wife irritatedly drags him by his jacket:  
 (Title) 'Tomorrow we'll say goodbye!'  
 79. Mayakovsky looks around, tears off his moustache and uniform and laughs.  
 80. In gratitude, he shoves three rubles in the pants pocket.  
 81. Mayakovsky dashes down the stairs and into a taxi.  
 82. Mayakovsky's ride.  
 83. Mayakovsky on the stage.  
 84. Someone in the audience talking.  
 85. Someone in the audience napping.  
 86. Mayakovsky on the attack.  
 87. People in the audience all ears.  
 88. Mayakovsky finishes reading. Notes handed up from the hall.  
 89. Applause.  
 90. Mayakovsky, tired, goes down the stairs.  
 91. Mayakovsky's ride home.  
 92. Mayakovsky tumbles into his room.  
 93. Mayakovsky sits down on the bed, unlaces his shoes.  
 94. Mayakovsky in bed with a book.  
 95. The room grows blurred.  
 96. Someday things will be like this:  
 97. Mayakovsky dictates into a microphone.  
 98. An audience full of people listening to loudspeakers.  
 99. Notes bounce along little conveyor belts and wires. It grows dark.  
 100. It grows dark  
 101. Blackness.  
 102. The family out in a field, drowsing under an umbrella.  
 103. Stars.  
 104. Mayakovsky sleeps.  
 105. Dream.  
 106. The sun rises from beyond the sea.

The End.

136 HEART OF THE SCREEN (Revision of the scenario *Shackled by Film*)  
A Factual-Fantasy in Four Parts with a Prologue and an Epilogue.

*Cast of Characters:*

- |                       |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Movie star         | 5. Douglas Fairbanks.       |
| 2. Painter.           | 6. Charles Chaplin.         |
| 3. Manicurist.        | 7. Rudolf Valentino.        |
| 4. A Man in a bowler. | A director and many others. |

*Prologue:*

1. (Title) Before the twentieth century, time left us only dead witnesses.
  2. A spider, weaving a web; beyond the web –
  3. (Title) Paintings . . .
  4. A *Grande* in a gilded frame. A sword and roses in his hands.
  5. (Title) Statues . . .
  6. Beneath the painting a marble Venus bends modestly.
  7. (Title) Books . . .
- On either side of the statues are enormous books: the Bible – the Song of Songs.
8. (Title) And then a man came out of his laboratory bubbling with joy.
  9. Loaded down with film equipment, an American-looking fellow (Edison) comes out of the door and strides gaily down the street.
  10. He took a fancy to setting ruins spinning. (Title).
  11. The American type turns the handle of the camera – the cobweb tears apart, the *Grande* climbs out of the painting and hands Venus the flowers. Venus comes alive and embraces him. Horn blowers crawl out of the books and glorify love.
  12. A portly, prosperous-looking gentleman wearing a bowler steps up to the man turning the handle, looks on ecstatically and slaps him on the back.
  13. (Title) You have a good thing here, sir.
  14. The American type takes off his hat, stops turning the handle and the picture fades away.
  15. (Title) How much?
  16. The American type holds up all ten fingers many times, takes off his shoes and counts his toes too.
  17. (Title) All right!
  18. The man in the bowler writes out a cheque, gives the cheque to the American and carries off the camera.

*Part One:*

1. (Title) Impossible not to turn and stare.
2. An enormously beautiful woman walks along the street. People who had been walking along carelessly, even bumping into one another, suddenly become very polite, turn and look, step aside to make way, stare undecidedly for a second, walk on and then turn to look again.
3. (Title) A man, not resembling a hero.

4. A puny looking house painter walks along, dragging his bucket of paint in one hand and balancing himself on the other side with his brushes.
5. Passers-by wrap their coats tightly around them as they get near the dirty bucket. As they pass it, they pick the imagined dust off their sleeves.
6. The phlegmatic painter almost runs into the Beauty, tries to get past, bumps into her, looks startled, and then, in his embarrassment, spreads his arms wide making way for her.
7. Frowning with disgust, the Beauty goes on.
8. The painter tries to go on, looks back, finally puts down his bucket, leans his brushes against the wall. He hurries after the Beauty, losing her in the crowd. He stands on tip-toe and shades his eyes with his hand.
9. (Title) A man under a foreign flag.
10. In a car with a foreign flag flying, the Franchise-holder floats by (the man in the bowler hat from the prologue).
11. The Beauty walking along.
12. The Franchise-holder turns his head, opens his eyes wider and wider and almost twists his head off.
13. The car stops in front of a trolley car.
14. The Beauty jumps onto the step of the overcrowded trolley.
15. The trolley starts to roll.
16. The painter, who has caught up, tries to jump on too. . .
17. A policeman grabs the painter by the seat of his pants.
18. The painter tries to pull himself away. The policeman is immovable. He demands a fine, taking out his ticket pad.
19. The laughing face of the Franchise-holder who looks back as he sails on by.
20. The trolley riding away with the Beauty.
21. The Franchise-holder tries to drive alongside the trolley.
22. Scratching his head, the painter pays the policeman a rouble.
23. The painter grins and shakes his fist.
24. (Title) I will earn back that rouble!
25. The Beauty jumps off the trolley. She runs across the street and, looking back, disappears into an entranceway.
26. The Franchise-holder gets out of his car, looks the building over, writes down the street and the house number.
27. He gestures to the doorman, with gestures describes the Beauty, and then writes down the name the doorman (who is delighted to receive a three-rouble note) gives him.
28. The painter picks up his bucket and brushes.
29. The painter walks along, walking right into passers-by, showered with curses by the people he splashes with paint.
30. (Title) The Beauty comes in handy.
31. The painter walks up to a Beauty Parlour with a half-finished sign on the glass window.
32. The painter arranges his scaffolding.
33. The painter climbs onto the scaffolding, dripping paint on the manicurist who is entering the store.
34. In the store the manicurist complains about the painter to the hairdressers and the boss, making threatening gestures at the window.
35. On the other side of the glass, the painter sketches the outline

138 of the Beauty.

36. The hairdressers move closer and stare in amazement.
37. A crowd starts to gather around the painter.
38. (Title) The star-maker.
39. The Franchise-holder rings the rusted bell on the peeling door.
40. The door opens a crack on a chain.
41. The Franchise-holder hands in his visiting card.
42. The card:  
Jones,  
Director of the Great Hollywood  
Association of Film Studios
43. Papa, mama and the Beauty examine the card in amazement.
44. The impatient Franchise-holder.
45. All together the family rushes to open the door to the Franchise-holder.
46. The Franchise-holder places his bowler on the table and displays movie posters and stills showing the most elaborate costumes.
47. The Beauty, her mouth open.
48. (Title) And here live the parents of the stars.
49. He displays architectural drawings of palaces before the ecstatic parents.
50. A brief bargaining session. (Title).
51. The teary-eyed but greedy parents count ten-rouble notes.
52. The Beauty signs a paper marked 'Contract'.
53. (Title) The enamoured painter's work went quickly.
54. The painter completes the Beauty's head, whipping up an unlikely hairdo for the portrait.
55. All the passers-by stop, look and applaud. Some of them pull at the painter's shirt and write down his address.
56. Turning away ecstatically every few minutes to look at the painter through the window, the manicurist jabs the man whose nails she is doing.
57. (Title) Finished.
58. The painter takes down his scaffolding and, looking one last time at the portrait, wanders home.
59. Part of his audience stays to gape, the other part runs after the painter.
60. A reporter, interviewing the painter.
61. Photographer run ahead of them taking pictures
62. At the beauty parlour, the hairdressers, the boss and the manicurist crowd together, grabbing the newspaper away from one another.
63. The evening news: An amazing new artist-sign painter.
64. The manicurist gazes lovingly at the portrait
65. (Title) All spruced up.
66. The painter, unrecognisable, shaved and combed, awkwardly fastens a bow-tie under his chin.
67. The orders roll in - and the customers too. (Title)
68. Women, men and children puff as they climb up the crooked staircase.
69. In the waiting room, models primp before many mirrors.
70. The painter seats a model - a most genteel little man with a book in his hand.

71. The painter steps back and starts to work with canvas and paints. 139  
72. The model gradually begins to grow transparent and instead of a heart, he has vodka bottles and a whoremaster inside.  
73. The painter puts down his brush.  
74. (Title) Come back tomorrow.  
75. A respectable matron makes a dignified entrance, and folding her little hands nobly, she assumes a prayerful pose.  
76. In despair, the painter takes up his brush.  
77. The woman grows transparent and instead of a heart, she has a bawdy young man with mustachios à la 'Gillette'.  
78. (Title) Come back tomorrow!  
79. The manicurist leans in the door.  
80. The painter greets her cheerfully. He seats her solicitously, steps back, palate in hand, looking at her.  
81. The manicurist too grows transparent and instead of a heart, she has the painter himself standing with the manicurist under the sign Registrar of Marriages.  
82. The painter throws down his brush in disgust, practically chases the manicurist out and slams the door.  
83. The painter sits down pensively.  
84. A large cut out of a heart arises.  
85. A tiny train passes through the heart, the Beauty's silhouette flashes by in one of the windows.

End of Part One

#### Part Two :

1. (Title) Business is bad.
2. The entrance to a movie theatre – a large, tattered poster.
3. 'The Cockroaches from Torzhok'  
An international feature.
4. The few people who come near the entrance, read the poster and turn away.
5. Two faces yawning with relish.
6. The doorman, drowsing in his luxurious uniform, suddenly jerks awake and grabs a potential viewer by his coat tail. He fights the doorman off and takes to his heels, leaving the coat tails behind.
7. A soaked, ragged cat slips dejectedly in through the movie theatre doors.
8. An entranceway.  
Rental Bureau.
9. Dejected boys in short jackets stand outside the door of the 'Director'.
10. (Title) No hot features.
11. The director with his aids and vice-directors. The director paces, gesticulating agitatedly. He goes up to the poster for 'The Cockroaches from Torzhok', tears it down, crumples it and throws it on the floor.
12. From under the shreds of the poster can be seen:  
Scientific film  
'Angina in Crocodiles'
13. The director looks at it and spits angrily.
14. A melancholy conference of head scratchers.

## 140 15. Sheets of paper:

Credit	Debit
1,235,756	23
	17

Total — 100000000000

16. With pencils in their paws, the conferees doodle dogs and cats under the accounts.
17. (Title) The longed-for guest.
18. The Franchise-holder's car rolls up to the entrance of the 'Rental Bureau'.
19. The Franchise-holder jumps out, and presses the bell. Under one arm he carries a roll of posters and under the other a round container of film.
21. The Franchise-holder enters the bureau as though he owned the place.
22. Employees, couriers and boys make way for the Franchise-holder. Their mood changing instantaneously from gloom to joy, the secretaries all turn towards him.
23. The dejected gathering of conferees.
24. In the doorway, the Franchise-holder stonily tips his bowler and then claps it on again.
25. A dozen joyously welcoming hands.
26. The director and an aid rush to meet him.
27. Not moving from the doorway, the Franchise-holder takes a poster by two corners and lets it unroll.
28. The poster:

'The Heart of the Screen!'  
 A universal film starring all the stars  
 and constellations!

- The Beauty is all dressed up and covered with jewels. She is surrounded by all the most famous movie personalities. In her hands she holds a huge heart.
29. The director steps back, enraptured.
  30. Solid applause from the board.
  31. The Franchise-holder opens the container of film.
  32. The conferees hold the end of the film up to the light.
  33. Individual frames of the Beauty in the most elegant costumes and captivating poses.
  34. The entire bureau, from the boys to the cleaning ladies, crowds around the poster, looking ecstatically at the huge poster.
  35. The director sends everyone out of the board room and remains alone with the Franchise-holder.
  36. (Title) Now we'll have a profit!
  37. The director servilely shakes the hand of the imperturbable Franchise-holder.
  38. (Title) A good product must be advertised.
  39. The Franchise-holder drums with his fingers on the container of film.
  40. The director grabs the phone, blows into it and growls a number.
  41. The phlegmatic painter answers the phone.
  42. The director makes a begging face.

43. The painter shakes his head no.

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44. The director insistently:

A hundred! Two hundred! Three hundred!

45. The painter thinks for a minute and then reluctantly agrees. He throws down the receiver and goes to get his hat.

46. The director, delighted, rubs his hands together.

(Title) He agreed, now it's in the bag.

47. The Franchise-holder leaves, colliding with the artist in the doorway.

48. Indifferent to everything, looking at no one, the artist goes to a chair, escorted by the director who is all compliments and solicitude.

49. (Title) We need a little poster for this movie.

50. The director turns the artist's shoulders towards the foreign poster:

51. The artist turns his indifferent eyes.

52. The painter's eyes open wider and wider.

53. The painter leaps up and runs to the posters.

54. The amazed director throws up his hands.

55. The painter clutches his heart and, almost stumbling, steps back from the poster.

56. The amazed director skips after the painter.

57. The painter throws himself on the floor, rolls up the poster, carefully presses it to him and runs to the door.

58. The director, totally amazed, grabs the painter by his jacket and puts a hand to the painter's forehead to see if he has a fever.

59. The painter tears himself away and pushes the director back with all five fingers of one hand:

60. (Title) All right, all right, everything will be the way you want.

61. The painter disappears through the door.

62. The director is frozen in bewilderment.

63. The painter runs down the street, knocking into passers-by, clutching the poster protectively to his heart.

64. The painter stops in front of the beauty parlour sign, unrolls the poster and compares the faces.

65. The hairdressers look out at the window and the manicurist shoves her way to the door.

66. (Title) It's her! It's her!

67. Hurriedly rolling up the poster, the painter dashes on.

68. Shoving on her hat as she goes, the manicurist hurries after the fleeing painter.

69. The painter flies up the stairs.

70. The manicurist stumbles after him.

71. Hardly breathing, the painter runs into his workshop, dropping the unrolled posters.

72. The manicurist runs in and stops in front of the poster woman. She recognises her. Angrily she goes up to the painter.

73. The painter simply takes the manicurist by the shoulders and puts her out the door.

74. The manicurist pounds on the locked door with her fist.

75. She hurts her fist and blows on it.

76. (Title) You striped sleepwalker!

77. She wags her finger threateningly at the door and, turning abruptly, runs down the stairs.

- 142 78. The painter looks like some sort of lunatic. Feverishly he pins up a piece of paper.  
79. On the sheet of paper the outlines of the beauty parlour, Beauty begins to appear.  
80. (Title) The campaign has begun.  
81. Posterhangers paste up the poster for 'Heart of the Screen'  
82. People instantly gather at the posters.  
83. Boys hand out fliers.  
84. A citizen carefully hides one of the fliers in his pocket.  
85. Newsies hawk newspapers with articles about 'Heart of the Screen'.  
86. Stumbling into others, a man reads the notices and looks at the portrait.  
87. A whole string of sandwichmen wear the poster for 'Heart of the Screen'.  
88. Lines of boys and adult movie fiends run after the sandwich men.  
89. The portrait rides by on an elephant, on a camel.  
90. The disdainful face of the sign painter.  
91. The painter stands on a ladder holding a brush.  
92. The painter whips up the hairdo on the beauty parlour Beauty to make it look like the latest shot from the film.  
93. The painter adds a necklace.  
94. (Title) A siege, in the quarter of an hour the advance sale of tickets will begin!  
95. The movie theatre doorman is besieged by a crowd, shoving and pushing for tickets.

#### End of Second Part

#### Part Three :

1. (Title) An insane day.
2. A crush at the entrance to the movie theatre which is decorated with the posters for 'Heart of the Screen'. The squeals of the crushed. Canes and umbrellas wave above the crowd.
3. (Title) One patron arrived almost at dawn.
4. In the empty theatre, impatiently looking at his watch, one man sits alone among all the seats – the painter.
5. The women who sell tickets look at him with amazement and reproach.
6. A mass in front of the doors.
7. The lobby doors. The crowd bursts in.
8. The crowd fills up all the seats.
9. Those who do not find seats crowd in the aisles.
10. The painter's face, impatiently straining forward.
11. The black screen. 'Heart of the Screen' lights up.
12. A gallery of concentrating faces.
13. Close-up of the painter, his eyes glued on the screen.
14. The screen – and on the screen, the Beauty. Holding a huge heart in her hands, the Beauty runs, hiding from the film people – Fairbanks, Valentino, Chaplin leaning on his cane, and others – who pursue her.
15. The rapt faces of the audience.
16. The action on the screen unfolds. The Beauty leaps from cliff to cliff. It seems that she is safe at last, but then the man in the bowler appears. Like a lasso, he tosses a ring of film. The Beauty is caught.

They pull at the Beauty.

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17. The tense faces of the audience.
18. The painter jumps out of his seat. The woman sitting in front of him, whose hat he hits, turns around annoyed.
19. The painter waves her off, crawling almost onto the screen.
20. The amazed faces of the audience looking at the painter.
21. (Title) The End.
22. The entire hall applauds.
23. The painter (standing on tiptoe) tries to raise himself above everybody else and applauds frantically.
24. Applauding as they go, the people leave the theatre.
25. Gradually, the painter is left alone, applauding and eyed by the existing audience.
26. The painter, applauding alone in the empty theatre, stands before the black screen which has finished its work.
27. The users come up to the painter. They try to get his attention and ask him to leave. Uneasy, the painter fights them off.
28. Suddenly the screen lights up and the Beauty appears on it. The Beauty starts to climb down from the screen.
29. Exchanging scared glances, the ushers clutch their heads and run away.
30. Alone, struck dumb, the painter stands with his arms spread expectantly.
31. The Beauty climbs down from the screen and, smiling, approaches the painter.
32. The painter, his eyes wide open, takes the Beauty's arm and walks through an empty passage in the chairs.
33. The doormen fearfully open the door before the unlikely couple.
34. The painter jumps out first. He looks around. The Beauty is gone.
35. The painter looks in amazement: like a vision, the film-Beauty passes through the closed door.
36. Spreading her arms, smiling, the Beauty sniffs the fresh street air.
37. (Title) I haven't seen all this in a long time. Living life makes my head spin.
38. Coming to his senses, the painter rushes to join the Beauty.
39. The Beauty frowns, dissatisfied.
40. The Beauty takes a step backwards. Slowly she moves backwards to the door and disappears through the locked mass of the door.
41. The painter throws himself at the door, but is stopped by its bolts and locks.
42. The painter pounds on the door. He pounds some more. He hurts his fists. Looking wildly around, he steps back, turns and runs away.
43. The painter, watched by the passers-by, runs along the street, loses his hat, but goes without picking it up.
44. Rushing past the waiting manicurist, without looking at her, he bursts into the entrance of his own house.
45. The distraught manicurist tries to catch his eye as he runs by.
46. The painter bursts into his work shop, throws himself on the bed and lies there motionless.
47. The manicurist pokes her nose in at the door. the manicurist enters the room, looks in horror at the half-dead painter and runs to the telephone.

- 144 48. The doctor picks up the receiver, listens, recognising the name, he jumps up, packs his medicine bag and runs out, putting on a coat as he goes.
49. In vain the manicurist tries to bring the painter to his senses.
50. The doctor knocks at the door.
51. The manicurist, upset, runs to open the door.
52. The doctor comes in, goes to the sick man's bed, gives him a phial to sniff, feels his pulse, and gives him a thermometer.
53. The doctor, taking his pulse, shakes his head with dissatisfaction.
54. 104.9 degrees Fahrenheit.
55. The painter tosses weakly.
56. The doctor writes out a prescription.
57. The manicurist grabs the prescription, slips the doctor some money, and then shows him out as she runs off to fill the prescription.
58. The manicurist runs into a drugstore. She is given little boxes, phials and jars.
59. The painter lies motionless in bed.
60. The manicurist runs back carrying the medicinal assortment wrapped in a piece of this paper.
61. The paper tears and the medicines scatter on the sidewalk.
63. The manicurist looks around, not knowing what to do.
64. The manicurist tears off a fence the first piece of paper which comes to hand – it is a poster for 'Heart of the Screen'. She wraps the medicine in the poster and runs on.
65. The manicurist at the painter's bedside feverishly unwraps the medicines. She drops the poster. She arranges the jars on a little table.
66. Opening his eyes, the painter's glance becomes glued to the piece of paper.
67. The painter jumps up, and shows the manicurist out.
68. Alone, the painter smooths out the crumpled poster, hangs it at the head of the bed, and, tired from the strain, lies down exhausted.
69. The fixed eyes of the painter.
70. A woman gradually separates herself from the poster hanging at the head of the bed, moves out of the frame and almost sits on the bed.
71. The joyful surprise of the painter who jerks to a sitting position, leaning on one hand.
72. The Beauty puts her hand on the painter's head and leans towards him.
73. (Title) Hello.
74. The manicurist's eye, fastened to a crack in the door.
75. The manicurist rubs her eyes and looks again, rubs them again and, her face contorted, runs headlong away from the door.
76. (Title) Strange happenings on the streets of the city.
77. Sandwich men walk along accompanied by gapers.
78. Suddenly the picture of the Beauty disappears from all of the sandwich posters.
79. The sandwich men continue to walk.
80. Rubbing their eyes, the gapers stop the sandwich men and point to the empty frames.
81. Dropping their empty frames, the sandwich men run off in terror.
82. A portly citizen is reading a poster for 'Heart of the Screen'

with obvious pleasure.

83. Suddenly, the woman disappears from the poster.

85. The Beauty's painting on the beauty parlour window. Slowly it disappears, fading away to nothing.

86. The customers runout of the beauty parlour, rubbing their eyes at this strange phenomenon.

87. The door to the 'Director's' office.

88. The director is sitting, absorbed, smiling over his profit figures.

89. The public, sitting in a movie theatre, looks impatiently at the clock.

90. Stamping feet.

91. The projectionist dashes about his booth looking for the vanished film.

92. The projectionist on the telephone.

93. The director answers the telephone.

94. The director listens, unable to understand. He questions the projectionist, then clutches his head, grabs the receiver again and dials agitatedly.

95. A telephone receiver in the hand of a security agent.

96. The director growls:

(Title) For the love of god and the devil, take immediate measures, our most profitable film has been stolen.

97. The security agent slams down the receiver, pushes a bell and in run the other agents. Excitedly they discuss what has happened and what measures to take.

98. (Title) Meanwhile, the people who have bought tickets wreck the movie theatre.

99. The people sitting in the theatre look at the clock. Then they knock the clock over and raise their fists.

100. Stamping feet breaking through the floor.

101. The projectionist in front of the screen, trying to calm the audience.

102. (Title) Citizens! Citizens!

The citizens break away from their places, destroying the seats. The citizens burst out onto the street, sweeping up the doorman and breaking down the doors.

End of Part Three

#### Part Four:

1. (Title) A day of extraordinary adventures.

2. (Title) A crowded meeting in an empty theatre.

3. The outside of the movie theatre, the doors locked.

4. The empty seats of the theatre with scattered scraps of posters and other traces of the mêlée of the day before.

5. The screen. An empty black spot in the place where the heart and the Beauty had been. Her pursuers are frozen in the suddenly arrested frame. Gradually, the pursuers start to move and one after another the two-dimensional figures climb down from the screen into the theatre. A whole crowd of famous and unsung movie heroes gathers: Fairbanks, Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, spies, tough guys, etc.

6. The heroes converse excitedly. Fairbanks calms the others. He seats them in a semi-circle, climbs on a chair and haltingly begins to speak.

- 146 7. (Title) Citizens of the movies, our heart, a chic and beautiful dame, has been stolen. Will rich old men and lovesick secretaries buy tickets now?
8. The distressed heroes agree with their speaker.
9. (Title) We must organise a search immediately.
10. The 'heroes' welcome the proposal decisively, rattling their movie weapons threateningly: Chaplin his cane, Lloyd his glasses, the spies their Brownings, the cowboys ready their lassoes.
11. (Title) Jealousy.
12. Angry and nervous, the manicurist runs into the beauty parlour. The beauty parlour is empty. The assistant hairdressers are reading the newspapers.
13. The manicurist sits at her table, absentmindedly rearranging the implements of her trade.
14. The newspaper readers become animated. They all focus on some notice. One of them tears the newspaper away, and, pointing to the notice, runs up to the manicurist.
15. The manicurist skims over the notice.
16. (Title) A major theft. Yesterday the film 'Heart of the Screen' was stolen from the 'Dawn' movie theatre. The losses are immense. The public . . . to whoever finds. . . .
17. The manicurist drops the paper and makes a fist at it.
18. (Title) He would even steal because of her.
19. All excited, the manicurist scurries around the beauty parlour.
20. The manicurist grabs the telephone book and searches quickly through it, running a finger down the columns of numbers. She finds it – and runs into the telephone booth.
22. The telephone rings in the office of the director of the movie trust. He is consulting gloomily with the Franchise-holder and the security agent.
23. The director's face becomes radiant, he yells excitedly to the instantly attentive visitors, slams down the receiver and all three get ready to leave, watching the door expectantly.
24. Laughing wickedly, the manicurist hurries along the street, her hat on cockeyed.
25. (Title) The inconvenience of romance with a two-dimensional person.
26. Rising up in his bed, the painter tries to embrace the Beauty but, when he succeeds, he find only a crumpled poster in his arms.
27. The painter rubs his eyes – the Beauty is already standing in another part of the room.
28. The painter, assuming that his excessive haste and crudeness has insulted the Beauty, tactfully and guiltily climbs out of bed.
29. With trembling hands, the painter straightens his tie and arranges his hair.
30. Grabbing a chair as he walks weakly and unsteadily across the room, bending politely, the painter puts the chair down and invites the Beauty to sit.
31. The Beauty slides to the chair and sinks onto it.
32. The painter takes another chair for himself, moves closer so he can sit next to her – and sees on the chair only the container from the film. Again the painter rubs his eyes.
33. The Beauty is standing in another part of the room. She points

- to the table covered with a white cloth.
34. Puzzled, the painter looks from the table to the Beauty.
35. The painter guesses. He grabs a corner of the tablecloth and pulls it over to the wall, stepping on the dishes which fall off the table.
36. The painter pins the tablecloth to the wall like a screen, and the beauty, delighted, takes her usual place against the white background. The Beauty indicates a place in front of her for the painter.
37. The painter sets his gramophone in front of the screen in place of the orchestra and takes his seat as a one-man audience. He stares at the screen, hardly able to stay on his chair.
38. The Beauty begins her well-learned role against the tablecloth screen.
39. (Title) The chase.
40. The door of the movie trust.
41. The door bangs forcefully open. Led by the manicurist, the director, the Franchise-holder and the agent run out.
42. The excited and preoccupied group piles into a car.
43. The automobile whizzes through the streets of the city.
44. The speeding automobile in the foreground, in perspective at the end of the street, the movie theatre can be seen looming larger and larger.
45. The locked doors of the movie theatre.
46. Through the locked doors a pair of eyeglasses becomes visible. The rest of Harold Lloyd climbs through the doors. He waves a hand to the others.
47. Buster Keaton becomes visible, dragging a toy car behind him.
48. Fairbanks climbs out, leading a horse by the reins.
49. A group of spies jumps out, loading their revolvers as they go.
50. The 'tough guys' climb out stealthily, carrying knives.
51. A crowd of cowboys becomes visible, dramatically adjusting their wide-brim hats, straightening out their lassoes and saddling their horses.
52. The automobile of the pursuers speeds past the theatre.
53. Leaning out of the car, the Franchise-holder signals to the heroes.
54. The heroes, running, riding and galloping, dash after the automobile.
55. An unusual hubbub in the quiet streets. In front rides the Franchise-holder's car; behind him Keaton's toy car; behind Keaton gallops Fairbanks; behind Fairbanks come the cowboys waving their lassoes; behind the cowboys the spies and the toughs charge along, every second looking around suspiciously. Chaplin, walking on stilts with his cane in his teeth, brings up the rear of the chase.
56. The chase stops at the entrance to the painter's house.
57. The pursuers run up the stairs.
58. The pursuers eavesdrop at the painter's door.
59. The painter, exhausted, rests his head on his hand and watches the Beauty raise the heart above the tablecloth screen.
60. Crowding in the hallway, the pursuers use beams to break down the door.
61. At the tremendous crash, the painter looks around.
62. The hoard, led by the manicurist, bursts into the room.
63. (Title) There they are.
64. The manicurist points first to the painter and then to the Beauty.

- 148 65. The painter crawls off into an unnoticed corner of the room.  
66. Paying no attention to the painter, the Franchise-holder approaches the Beauty, holding the contract up before him like a shield.  
67. (Title) Return to the movies, you are ruining us.  
68. The Beauty retreats (growing smaller on the screen) and shakes her head no.  
69. The Franchise-holder falls on his knees and begs shaking his wallet.  
70. (Title) Come back, we will pay you twice as much as Gloria Swanson.  
71. The Beauty retreats further, though her move is less decisive, but still shaking her head.  
72. (Title) What are you standing and looking at her for?  
73. The manicurist jumps out of the crowd, at a loss at what to do at first, she then grabs a knife from one of the toughs and plunges it into the Beauty.  
74. The Beauty turns into a poster and the knife only tears the poster paper and lodges firmly in the wall. The Beauty stands next to it and laughs.  
75. The manicurist faints.  
76. The Franchise-holder kicks her aside.  
77. (Title) Take the idiot away.  
78. The Franchise-holder comes right up to the Beauty and, with a threatening gesture, takes a piece of film from his pocket.  
79. (Title) You don't want to come back of your own free will, then we will take you by force of all the habits of our society, by the iron force of the unwritten law of our taste for dollars.  
80. The Franchise-holder wraps the film around her, and the Beauty melts into the celluloid. Finishing with the Beauty, the Franchise-holder wraps film around all the remaining movie heroes. The manicurist runs out in terror.  
81. In the room remain the Franchise-holder who winds the film into the container which was lying on the table, the director, who rubs his hands joyfully, and the painter. He looks wildly around from the corner in which he is lying.  
82. Having packed up the film, the director goes out first, followed by the Franchise-holder. The end of the film is sticking out of his pocket. When he slams the door, the end is caught.  
83. The director and the Franchise-holder run down the stairs - behind them unwinds the snagged film.  
84. The director and the Franchise-holder ride in the car - behind the speeding car the film continues to unwind.  
85. Alone, the painter wipes the sweat from his brow. He looks at himself, at the pinned up tablecloth, at the bed. He tries to force himself to remember what happened, but cannot.  
86. He reaches for his pipe and matches which he dropped in all the confusion.  
87. Slowly, with great relish, the painter lights his pipe. The painter tosses away the burning match.  
88. The burning match flies through the air.  
89. The match lands on the snagged end of the film.  
90. The film ignites.

91. The frightened look of the painter.  
92. The flame burns along the film which curls down the stairs.  
93. Like a fuse, the flash runs across the city.  
94. The flame darts under the door of the movie trust office.  
95. The flame flies up the stairs to the director's door.  
96. The satisfied Franchise-holder and the director examine the film against the light.  
97. The flame runs around the room.  
98. The flame climbs to the hands of the dumbfounded Franchise-holder and the director.  
99. The flame explodes the film container.  
100. The director and the Franchise-holder dash around the room, in vain trying to extinguish the growing fire.  
101. The panic of people and things in the burning office.

End of Part Four

Epilogue:

1. (Title) As usual, the best-looking young women and men go to the doors of the film trust to hire themselves out to the movies.
2. Hurrying, primping as they go, straightening their ties, evening out the crease in their trousers, they go to apply for jobs in the movies.
3. At the locked doors of the film trust – policemen and whispering men in bowlers.
4. The crowd arrives. People get irritated and point out the newspaper announcement to the policemen and the men in bowlers.
5. (Title) Pretty girls from the ages of 16 to 24 are required for the completion of contracts for filming in Am . . . passage . . . wardrobe.
6. From the crowd of bowlers, the saddest and most solid man steps out, and, standing on tiptoe on the top step, speaks, calming the crowd with his hand.
7. (Title) The film trust has burned down. Movies from our world, for various reasons, cannot find tranquility and a proper place in your serious republic. Therefore . . . discontinued. . . .
8. After stamping around for a while, the crowd disperses. The charred door, empty, guarded by policemen.
9. The last to leave are a cameraman and a 17 year old actress, almost a younger double of the Beauty from 'Heart of the Screen'.
10. At first they walk along sadly; then they grow more animated and chat gaily.
11. The cameraman stops and, taking the girl by the arm, points to the scene before them.
12. On the huge scaffolding of a huge construction a carpenter is working, lightheartedly and gaily hammering some board into place high above the whole city.
13. The cameraman swings his camera off his shoulder and quickly adjusts the focus.
14. (Title) Why shouldn't the movies go in for real life? That trick beats Fairbanks!
15. The cameraman turns the handle of his camera. The girl watches him ecstatically.
16. The cameraman finishes his work. The girl comes close to him.
17. (Title) And why have I only kissed on the screen up to now?
18. They embrace and kiss. Translations by Elizabeth Henderson

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Stanley Mitchell

This article originally took the form of a lecture designed to explore the inter-relationship between art and ideology by means of a particularly pointed and paradoxical example, viz the fact that the two major Futurists should have chosen, as their political ideology, on the one hand fascism (Marinetti), on the other communism (Mayakovsky). To this paradox there are two obvious answers: either that art-forms connect only fortuitously with ideologies, hence the paradox ceases to be interesting; or, on the contrary, that fascism and communism are sufficiently alike for them to find expression in a common art-form. The second answer may be put in a more sophisticated way by showing how fascism and communism fed on similar iconoclastic energies until they achieved power, when they quickly sacrificed their embarrassing *avant-gardes* to the pressures and needs of demagogy.

But each of the answers is superficial and unsatisfactory. It is true that fascism shares with communism an open avowal of violence as a political means and that their ends are extreme and uncompromising. In this sense the violence of Futurism seems to capture them both. Nevertheless, the matter is not quite so simple, because in each case the strategy of the violence and the nature of the end differ from one another as radically as they seem to converge. And likewise, as we hope to show, with the two Futurisms. The connections between art and ideology are neither accidental, nor (at least, not necessarily) direct. Why the problem should interest readers of *Screen* is that it poses essentially the same question as the *Cahiers du Cinéma* editorial, reproduced in the recent Spring number. The French editors are concerned with the ancient aesthetic puzzle: the relationship between content and form (in this instance between a revolutionary content and a correspondingly revolutionary form) or, to use their terms, between 'signified' and 'signifier'. At the same time, their problem is a special one, peculiarly bound up with the technical nature of film-making:

We are not shutting our eyes to the fact that it is an oversimplification (employed here because operationally easier) to make such a distinction between the two terms. This is particularly so in the case of the cinema, where the signified is more often than not a production of the permutations of the signifiers, and the sign has dominance over the meaning.

In other words, they perceive an implicitness of meaning in the technical means of expression chosen. 153

Returning to the inter-relationship between Futurism and the ideologies of fascism and communism, we may likewise ask whether the art-form already contains, in its means of expression, elements of an ideology. A useful, shorthand guide to this question is provided by the Futurist manifestoes (especially the Italian), miniature works of art in themselves. Marinetti's original 1909 manifesto begins with eleven declarations of intent, culminating in the following:

We shall sing of the great crowds in the excitement of labour, pleasure and rebellion; of the multi-coloured and polyphonic surfs of revolutions in modern capital cities; of the nocturnal vibration of arsenals and workshops beneath their violent electric moons; of the greedy stations swallowing smoking snakes; of factories suspended from the clouds by strings of smoke; of bridges leaping like gymnasts over the diabolical cutlery of sunbathed rivers; of adventurous lines scenting the horizon; of broad-chested locomotives prancing on the rails, like huge steel horses bridled with long tubes; and of the gliding flight of aeroplanes, the sound of whose screw is like the flapping of flags and the applause of an enthusiastic crowd.

No ideology is apparent in this paragraph. What fascinates Marinetti is the infinite surface-play, the kaleidoscopic nature of the modern city and modern machines. Nevertheless, an epistemological question imposes itself. What lies behind and beneath the surfaces? Revolutions may look 'multi-coloured' and sound 'polyphonic', but whose revolutions are they? What indeed are their colours? How do those surrealist-futurist factories, suspended by smoke from the clouds, relate to wage-labour, profits or strikes? These and similar questions breach the bright innocence of technological aesthetics and lead into the hinterland of ideology. Marinetti's preceding paragraphs 9 and 10 are indeed more explicitly ideological:

9. We wish to glorify War – the only health giver of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive arm of the Anarchist, the beautiful Ideas that kill, the contempt for woman.
10. We wish to destroy the museums, the libraries, to fight against moralism, feminism and all opportunistic and utilitarian meanness.

The prerequisites of a fascist philosophy are here: the beauty of technology lies in its power to destroy and kill. Yet the imagery of the exuberant paragraph 11 is not destructive, but, on the contrary, revels in new powers and perceptions. True, the colours are garish; and Marinetti is more concerned with products than producers, with crowds than people, factories than workers. Nevertheless, the declarations of the preceding paragraphs are

154 not yet implicit here. There remains a breathing-space. We are at that point described by Walter Benjamin at the end of his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Discussing there Marinetti's enthusiastic manifesto on the Italian colonial war in Ethiopia, he comments:

This manifesto has the virtue of clarity. Its formulations deserve to be accepted by dialecticians. To the latter, the aesthetics of today's war appears as follows: If the natural utilisation of productive forces is impeded by the property system, the increase in technical devices, in speed, and in the sources of energy will press for an unnatural utilisation, and this is found in war. The destructiveness of war furnishes the proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society. The horrible features of imperialist warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilisation in the process of production – in other words, to unemployment and lack of markets. Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology, which collects, in the form of 'human material', the claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead of draining rivers, instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities. . . .

'*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*', says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratifications of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of '*l'art pour l'art*'. Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction, as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.

The axis of Benjamin's analysis is formed by the contradiction between means of production and their inadequate utilisation (due to unemployment and lack of markets). In the era of late capitalism and imperialism the development of means of production is unprecedentedly rapid. (It would, however, make a useful comparison to examine the artistic consequences of rapid technological advance in earlier ages, from the invention of the wheel to the Industrial Revolution.) Countries like Italy and Russia suffered especially hard, in the international scramble for markets, from their internal backwardness. In Italy art occupied a unique social position, because the country had become a museum for tourists, economically parasitic. Hence, to destroy the art of the past, to transform Florence, Rome and Venice into super-modern industrial cities presented itself as a prime political task to Marinetti.

Hence, too, the unique link which the Italian Futurists fashioned between politics and art. (In Russia, by contrast, a variety of artistic movements associated themselves with the revolution. True, Futurism was the most clamorous amongst them, but only in the wake of the revolution, when the original groups had already dissolved. Further, whatever the power and scope of Russia's literature and art in the nineteenth century, in terms of social presence they bore no comparison with Italy's enormous palpable and centuries-long cultural inheritance.) Against the old art of the ruins and the museums Marinetti proclaimed a new art based on technology. The Italian Renaissance had been able to solve the relationship between art and technology in a more proportionate and harmonious manner (perspective and painting, engineering and architecture). The situation of Marinetti's Italy was far more problematic: a legacy of social backwardness and artistic stagnation on the one hand, the unprecedented possibilities of new forces of production on the other. To Marinetti Renaissance humanism (not to mention Catholicism) was irreconcilable with modern technology. He therefore produced his modernist slogans which Italian fascism was only half to carry out, destroying not so much the past of Italy as the towns and populations of altogether more backward countries.

For Benjamin, however, the important thing about Marinetti is not his alliance of technology with fascism, but his appreciation of the changes in perception wrought by the new technology and of the need to gratify these new powers artistically. Between Marinetti's awareness and its ideological utilisation lies a thin dividing-line. If there is meaning implicit in the awareness, it is certainly revolutionary, in the general sense of urgently and radically desiring change. Explicit meaning declares itself on the other side of the dividing-line, embracing destruction, oppression, nihilism.

Mayakovsky, by contrast to Marinetti combines, though unequally, a revolutionary form with a revolutionary content. Unlike Italy, Russia broke through to a socialist revolution. Russian Futurism, on the other hand, was never, except after its demise, when Mayakovsky formed LEF, a *political* movement. If we look at the original Russian Futurist manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, what strikes us is the exclusive concern with poetics, with what its signatories called the 'Self-sufficient (self-centred) Word'. The Russian Futurists declared war only on Russian *writers* of the past: 'Let us throw overboard Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky from the steamship of modernity'. Almost puristically, they were preoccupied with *poetic* means of production, independent of ideological implications. In this respect they partook of a general-innovatory enthusiasm which, alongside Futurism proper, created a theoretical analogue and support for the latter in Formalism, one of the most brilliant and influential

156 schools of literary criticism in the twentieth century and, certainly, one of the oddest products of the Russian revolutionary era.

Mayakovsky engaged in political activity on behalf of the Bolsheviks as a schoolboy in Georgia, long before he became a Futurist. His poetry and his politics developed along separate lines and at different rates. As we have mentioned, it was not until after the Revolution that Mayakovsky drew any overt connection between Futurism and Communism, when the original movement as such had petered out. His Futurist verse is ideological only in a general and unprogrammatic sense. Apart from a momentary, Marinetti-like enthusiasm for the war, envisaging the destruction as an anti-bourgeois purgation, Mayakovsky's Futurist poetry may be described as apocalyptically humanitarian (paving the way for Communist internationalism). Traditional themes of love, adoration of women, sympathy for the oppressed and downtrodden, a most vulnerable desire for martyrdom course through the most innovative imagery and style. Probably every image in Marinetti's original manifesto could be found in Mayakovsky's poetry. But the ideological and emotional context are always different. Even in his high-Futurist stage Mayakovsky could harness the technical discoveries of the new style to radically different ends.

In *Conversation with a Tax Inspector*, a poem written well on into the Soviet period, but still sparkling with the old Futurist temper, Mayakovsky defines the elements of poetic creation as follows:

In our language  
rhyme is a barrel.  
A barrel of dynamite.  
The line is a fuse.  
The lines smoulders to the end  
and explodes;

and the town is blown sky-high in a stanza

Futurism proper considered the word a material force in its own right, so much so that some Futurists sought to create a technology of sound and sign and composed the earliest examples of concrete poetry. Here the explosive is merely a playful metaphor (the poem is constructed out of a series of metaphors of this kind). By turning the original Futurist ambition into metaphor Mayakovsky is able to do two (apparently opposed) things: to establish both the utilitarian and non-utilitarian nature of poetic production:

Poetry is like mining radium.  
For every gramme you work a year.  
For the sake of a single word  
you expend thousands of tons of verbal ore.  
But how much more heat arises  
from the combustion of these words  
than from the smouldering of raw verbal material!

Thus on the one hand poetry is metaphor, on the other it requires the same kind of work, outlay and investment as certain types of industry. Yet again its aim differs from the immediate aims of industry, for it sets in motion 'millions of hearts for thousands of years'. In this way Mayakovsky transcends the direct identification between art and industry or technology which many of the *avant-garde*, especially those engaged in *Proletkult*, had sought. The technologisation of art is not to be confused with what Benjamin had in mind when he called for the politicisation of art.

But, as we see from the *Tax Inspector*, the latter was no simple propagandist exercise either. Nevertheless, a long poem like Mayakovsky's *Lenin*, with its film-like succession of images (very much in the mode of early Eisenstein), would be unthinkable without the poet's feverish production of captioned picture-posters during the revolutionary years. But what this means is that Mayakovsky's *agitprop* art, while valuable in its own right, forms the basis or raw-material for those poems which 'set in motion millions of hearts'.

Mayakovsky describes the making of such a poem (*To Sergei Esenin*) in the essay *How are Verses Made?* (1926). The aim or 'social command' which he assigns himself is to counteract the effect of Esenin's suicide note in verse, the last lines of which read:

In this life to die is nothing new  
But to live, of course, is newer . . .

To these lines Mayakovsky was to reply at the conclusion of his poem:

In this life  
to die  
has never been hard.  
To make new life  
    's more difficult  
    By far.

Mayakovsky argued that nothing else could annul Esenin's death-poem but one which affirmed life, and specifically the difficult life brought forth by the Revolution. But the making of the poem, from basic rhythm to final articulation, took months. Mayakovsky describes the complex forging of poetic tools adequate to fighting down Esenin's words. The dead poet's tragedy, declares Mayakovsky in his poem, lay in his stubborn desire to continue singing in the old way (Esenin was a poet of the pre-industrial countryside). But now was the time for combat and construction, no song. What then was left for poetry? In Mayakovsky's answer the old Futurist spirit re-ignites:

Words are  
the commanders  
of mankind's forces.

March!  
And behind us  
time

explodes like a mine.

'Merriment' and 'happiness' may only be snatched on the way:  
For merriment  
our planet  
isn't well equipped.

One must  
tear  
happiness

from the days to come.

Poetry's task, therefore, is to help equip our planet with new life. When life has been remade, song can begin again. Such was Mayakovsky's politicisation of art. The poetry which drew its images and energies from the new cities and constructions would no longer sing the old lyric themes, but command the inner forces of men in a revolutionary manner. Here Futurism came into its own again in a socialist context. Mayakovsky and Stalin, one might suggest, are as connected as Marinetti and Mussolini, for not only did Stalin ensure Mayakovsky's fame as a posthumous poet laureate, but also, in a characteristically Mayakovskian manner, described the writer as an 'engineer of the human soul' (though Stalin certainly meant by 'engineering' something more narrowly pragmatic and utilitarian than Mayakovsky would have done). It may also be mentioned, though the problem cannot be pursued here, that Mayakovsky himself foundered on the rival claims of politics and 'song' and, like Esenin, committed suicide only four years later.

The politicisation of art, demanded by Benjamin, depends upon the proper utilisation of the means of production, in this case, artistic production. What distinguishes the art of the twentieth century is the unprecedented range of media, modes of perception and communication at its disposal. No other age has witnessed such rapid successions of differing artistic movements, forms and techniques. For this reason it is more than usually wrong to propose any direct relationship between form and ideology (Lukács, for example, argues that a writer's form expresses his 'real' ideology as distinct from his privately-held beliefs). The superstructure, to use the Marxist term, is no longer merely ideological. With the proliferation of media it has, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger's phrase, become a 'consciousness industry' (see his article in *New Left Review* 64). From a similar standpoint Benjamin (upon whom Enzensberger bases himself) is anxious to differentiate form from ideology in 'the age of mechanical reproduction'. For form has

become a much more technical matter and technology is independent of ideology. Hence, for example, rather than treat dadaism, cubism, futurism as decadent art-forms à la Lukács, Benjamin is far more concerned to show how (unconsciously) they foreshadowed the techniques and effects of the film (cf. my earlier remarks on Mayakovsky's film-like imagery which not only resembles Eisenstein in practice, but which the latter put to use in his theory of montage, borrowing images from the *Esenin* poem as illustration – see 'Word and Image' in *The Film Sense*). Benjamin remarks:

The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form. The extravagances and crudities of art which thus appear, particularly in the so-called decadent epochs, actually arises from its richest historical energies.

In earlier ages one could see a much simpler relationship between form and ideology. It would not be difficult, for example, to transpose our present example of ideological opposites *mutatis mutandis* to the age of Romanticism and think of a revolutionary versus a reactionary Romantic, say, Blake or Shelley, as against Coleridge or Wordsworth. (In some ways this opposition would be more complex, not as clearcut, given the particular personalities, as between Marinetti and Mayakovsky, but that need not affect our argument.)

On the one hand, they would differ in attitude and style. On the other, they would share a certain stock of imagery and diction together with a general hostility to eighteenth century materialism and rationalism. But what would not be theirs, either in common or separately, would be a new perceptual framework (though this applies less to the more percentually-based, less ideological arts, viz. Turner's impressionism *ante rem* or Beethoven's revolutions in instrumentation). It is precisely the perceptual revolution which has created a new complexity, whereby form is no longer the more or less simple expression of content and technique merely an auxiliary, but where content, form and technique interrelate, very often, asymmetrically. Such asymmetry registers the increase in means of artistic production over and above traditional relationships between form and content.

Brecht seizes this problematic when, very much in the spirit of Benjamin, he wrote:

The techniques of Joyce and Döblin are not merely the products of decay; if one excludes their influence instead of modifying it, one will simply end up with the influence of the epigones, namely the Hemingways. . . . The works of Joyce and Döblin show, very impressively, the world historical contradiction between the forces

160 of production and the relations of production. To a certain degree the productive forces are represented in these works.

Brecht advises socialist writers to learn from these works;

Above all, socialist writers can acquaint themselves in these documents of deadlock with valuable, highly-developed technical elements.

As examples he lists interior monologue and alternation of styles (Joyce), dissociation of elements (Döblin, Dos Passos), associative writing (Joyce, Döblin), news-montage (Dos Passos), alienation (Kafka).

The 'deadlock' that is expressed by the 'content' of these documents corresponds to the capitalist relations of production; the highly-developed technical elements to the productive forces of capitalism. (Brecht here disregards the question of form, i.e. the organisation of content, almost certainly as part of a contemporary polemic with Lukács, who relegates technique to the position of mere auxiliary or adjunct).

The 'highly-developed technical elements' are not in themselves ideological. It depends, as Brecht says, upon their function or indeed 'refunctioning' (*Umfunktionierung*), modification. The comparison which we have sketched in this article should teach us how artificial and misleading it is to separate 'signifiers' from 'signified'. For the meaning of the 'signifiers', whatever their inherited signals, results finally from their function in a given work, in a given content and context. Meaning cannot be injected by an assembly of signs or icons. Superficially, it is possible to compare Mayakovsky and Marinetti on the basis of their Futurist imagery, but to do so would be like picking out similarly-coloured segments from two very different mosaics.

On the other hand, to ignore or reject the 'signifiers' because of the ideological uses to which they have been put itself constitutes an ideological act, for technical conservatism breeds its ideological concomitant. 'Fascism . . . expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology'. (Benjamin). Communism should, and has at times sought to, provide the artistic gratification of a sense of perception based on a constructive technology.

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Peter Wollen

1. Form and content in classical aesthetics. Both the rationalist (Descartes) and empiricist (Locke) philosophical positions elaborated in the seventeenth century saw language as fundamentally secondary to thought. Ideas were formed in the mind, more or less without the intervention of language, whether because of innate faculties or abstraction from sense impressions, and then *expressed* through the means of language. There was a general feeling that language was apt to traduce thought. Reason was universal, common to all humanity, but languages were limited to separate individual nations and varied to different degrees from the norms of reason itself. Hence the claims for one language or another as best expressing the workings of reason (the Port-Royal Grammar) and the search for a 'rational' language, free from the imperfections of natural language (Leibniz).

The attitude towards art followed that towards language. Pope's well-known tag, 'What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed', puts it in a nutshell. Buffon's equally famous, 'Style is the man', should also be seen within this framework. Buffon's point was that the content of a work of art was the part of the work which could be communicated, but the style, the outer garb and clothing, remained peculiar to the artist and anchored in his individuality. In fact, the transition from the idea of impersonal rhetoric to that of personal style already marked the advent of the first stirrings of Romanticism.

Classical aesthetics should be seen as a development within the mainstream of philosophical idealism. This applies as much to the Lockean as to the Cartesian current. Ideas came first and expression second. The material marks and signs, letters, sounds, etc., were inadequate to their ideal content, but the goal was to be complete transparency. The relation of the text to the thought 'behind' it, was similar to the relationship of the material world to the divine Logos. Beauty was the necessary concept which embraced both the universality of reason and the individuality of style.

2. Romanticism. The Romantics rebelled against Classical aesthetics. For instance, they could not accept the separation between content and form implied by the aphorisms of Pope or Buffon. It became a Romantic dogma or platitude that thought and language were inseparable. This is to be found in the early works of Marx, among countless others. Similarly content and form were

inseparable. There was not simply an outer form, imposed 'mechanically' like the sugaring on a pill, but an 'inner form', shaping from within organically, identical with the content itself. Inspiration and creativity were stressed, rather than skill and craftsmanship.

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Romanticism, however, was no less idealist than classicism. Often the body/soul metaphor drawn directly from Christian theology was used instead of the old body/clothing metaphor. Art became seen as a kind of sacramental activity, in which material consumption symbolically embodied ideal consumption. When the Romantics rejected the idea that thought could be communicated because of the universality of reason and insisted on the identity of individual thought and individual style, they destroyed the grounds on which art had been seen as a medium, a channel, a link between individuals. Belief in the irreducible specialness of each individual meant that the function of art as communication was directly threatened. Hence, on the one hand, the growth of ideas such as 'identification', 'empathy', etc, and, also, the development of a symbolist aesthetic which saw art not as the communication of rational thought, but as a means of induction to a supra-rational realm of mystical truths. Translation and paraphrase were deemed impossible.

A crucial part of the Romantic programme was to set art up as a rival to science. Classical aesthetics saw no distinction in order between the truths of art and those of science, equally subject to reason. Science, as it were, produced thought and art then expressed it. Romanticism insisted that art produced thought but of a special kind, different from that produced by science, and distinct from it especially in that the moment of creation was at the same time the moment of expression. At first, it seemed that the two enemies, art and science, would never meet, but would compete simply for recruitment, but towards the end of the nineteenth century fierce ideological battles began to be fought in the disputed terrain of the 'human sciences' which, like Romantic art, sought to import the magical unity of essence and appearance into science itself, to create a science of 'divination' in which, though empirical, there would be no separation between kernel and shell, in which every detail would be an expression of the whole.

3. Modernism. Both Marinetti and Mayakovsky were in the forefront of the first wave of modernism, which made possible a decisive break with both Classicism and Romanticism, a possibility which, I believe, has unfortunately not been consolidated. The crucial new development in modernism was to focus on the *text* itself. This trend, of course, builds up during the nineteenth century: Mallarmé stands out in this respect. But it was not till the period just before the first World War that the real shift occurred. It is worth, perhaps, noting that this was not simply the period of

- 164 Marinetti, Mayakovsky, Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov, Kandinsky, Picasso, etc, etc, but that of Freud and Saussure who also revolutionised our ideas about language. Indeed, both Kruchenykh and Freud focussed attention on the *lapsus linguae*, to give one example of parallelism.

Stanley Mitchell says in his article that 'meaning' cannot be injected by an assembly of signs'. I am not quite sure what he means by this, but it has to be recognised that, for the most part, assemblies of signs are all we have, when we study the working of any art. All I know of Marinetti or Mayakovsky comes from books, plus a few photographs. When we read Mayakovsky we are not trying to gain access through the text, as through an ante-chamber, to Mayakovsky's thought, in the Classical manner. If we want marxist thought, as such, we would certainly be better occupied reading Lenin. Nor are we concerned with the Romantic myth that by projecting ourselves into Mayakovsky's place or allowing Mayakovsky to take us over, like a being from outer space, we are gaining a new, superior insight or intuitive knowledge. Modernism insists that we read a text - a work of art - because it is through art that we can perceive the hollow places in language and in ideology, the places where words ring false, where we can see what is not said, where there are rifts, ironies, or, as the logicians say, amphibologies. Language is not thought, nor does it lead us to thought already constituted, nor conceal it from us. Thought has no more identity, in the empiricist sense, than language. Language and thought are mutually the *sine qua non* to each other. They are neither isomorphic, nor co-terminous, nor is one a mapping on to the other. Each 'betrays' the other and it is precisely in the space of this mutual 'betrayal' that art acts within the structured location of the sign itself.

4. Ideology and art. In the end, Stanley Mitchell comes up with a grid looking roughly as follows:

	Content	Form
Mayakovsky	+	+
Marinetti	-	+
'X'	+	-
'Y'	-	-

'X', I suppose, would be a standard 'socialist realist' artist and 'Y' a fascist traditionalist. Thus Stanley Mitchell admits there is no iron law of identity of form and content, but he nonetheless thinks a certain kind of form is more appropriate than another to a certain kind of content. By using a reactionary form, writer 'X' is, indirectly, undermining revolutionary content. Presumably the reverse is true of Marinetti: his futurist techniques and stylistic devices subverted the fascist content in a subtle way. Writer 'Y' may have achieved unity of form and content but he still figures at the bottom of the scale. It is not quite clear to me how Stanley

I feel this kind of model leaves a lot to be desired. In essence, I think it marks an attempt to find a compromise between the Classical and Romantic models I outlined above. Content has priority, as in the Classical model, and form is a means. On the other hand, it is not completely neutral, because 'technological conservatism breeds its ideological concomitant', thus re-establishing the Romantic connexion between form and content; the form chosen re-acts back on the content. They are no longer inseparable, but nor is it indifferent which form goes with which content. Form has a definite implication for content, it does shape it in a certain sense. 'Form is no longer the more or less simple expression of content'. It matters whether a writer is a Communist or a fascist, but it also matters (less?) whether he is a futurist or a passéist.

Stanley Mitchell has not succeeded in cutting the Gordian knot; he has simply unravelled it in a more complicated way, so that it loops back on itself a lot of the time. The root fault, I feel, is that he is over-reluctant to incur the charge of 'formalism'. The problem is that ideologies of art are for ever swamping and waterlogging the distinct practice of art itself. Emphasis on the text is immediately liable to be attacked as 'art for art's sake', whereas the ideal content, usually hypostasised, is somehow regarded as more 'real'. It needs to be said that, as far as *aesthetics* is concerned, it matters more whether a text is futurist or passéist than whether it is ideologically Communist or fascist. Hence the importance of Pound or Marinetti. Moreover I think Mayakovsky is worth reading more than Marinetti not because he was a Communist but because his *writing* is more significant. Of course, one can make judgements on the political practice of Mayakovsky and Marinetti as well, but this demands radically different concepts and criteria. It is simply confusing to try and deal with aesthetics and politics under the same rubric. The relationship between the two is a complex question in itself, which could not possibly be settled by 'comparing' two individual literary corpuses.

The question that usually arises is that of the 'effects' of works of art. If reading Pound or Marinetti has a bad 'influence' then surely it should be condemned. What is forgotten is that the 'influence' is a function of the *mode of reading*, not of the text itself. What must be attacked is fascist reading of Marinetti or, for that matter, of Mayakovsky. Nor is a 'Communist' reading the answer. What is required is a *materialist* reading, based on a *scientific aesthetic*. This in turn must provide the concepts which explain the working of the sign and systems of signs, which is quite distinct from the workings of ideology. Aesthetics, like psycho-analysis, has its own distinct field. The material of aesthetics consists of texts and artefacts, seen as semiotic productions of

- 166 a particular kind. These texts consist of 'assemblies of signs' and *nothing else*. There are no thoughts to be found elsewhere, not even immanent but invisible, like the soul in the body. The semantic content of a sign is simply one face of the sign and is constitutive of it, but it can only be grasped, not by reading, re-reading and re-re-reading the text in an ideological manner, critically, sensitively, receptively or whatever, but by reading it scientifically. The production of aesthetics precedes the problem of 'the meaning of art', which will vanish when it is solved, re-formulated and unrecognisable.

## **symposium 1**

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Sergei Eisenstein, Léon Moussinac, *Cinéma d'Aujourd'hui*  
Editions Seghers (in English)

Léon Moussinac was an intimate friend of Eisenstein from soon after the first Paris showing of *Battleship Potemkin* until the death of Eisenstein in 1948; he was also a keen student of the Soviet cinema and in particular the films of Eisenstein, and the essay which forms the central part of this book reflects this dual concern. Although the subtitle of the book is 'An investigation into his films and philosophy' Moussinac's main concern seems to be to present an *homage* rather than a piece of sustained criticism. For example, the line:

To be in the presence of Eisenstein was to be in the presence of genius. p 21.

suggests the reverential tone of the essay and links Moussinac with the MacMahonist writers whose avowed task was adulation rather than analysis, the difference being that Moussinac's intimate relationship with Eisenstein moves him towards presenting the man as opposed to simply presenting his work.

The essay is very much a personal memoir. Moussinac recounts the powerful impact that *Battleship Potemkin* had upon him when he saw it in 1926

When the images of Sergei Eisenstein's creation unrolled before me in the small screening room, I suffered real pain because I had no one with whom to share my enthusiasm and astonishment. p 10.

Moussinac and his comrades at the Ciné-Club de France had actively propagated the serious study of film but until *Potemkin* were unable to see any Soviet films though they were undoubtedly aware that the cinema had an important place in the Russian revolutionary programme from Lenin's statements on the subject. The films had such an impact on Moussinac that he felt impelled to go to Russia and to see exactly what was happening. His chance came in October 1927 when he arrived in Russia for the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Revolution.

It was, of course, at this time that he first met Eisenstein thus beginning the long friendship with the director which lasted until his death in 1948. Much of their relationship was sustained by letter and much of the memoir is built around what Eisenstein himself referred to as their 'epistolary relations'. Moussinac clearly regards this method of reaching Eisenstein as superior to others:

I believe the several letters I shall have occasion to reproduce in this little book will allow the reader to know Eisenstein better than anything I can say about him, better than anything anyone can say about him before the complete publication of his memoirs, lectures and notes. p 26.

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But what exactly does the correspondence reveal? It certainly reveals a warm relationship which developed between the two men; and further it also reveals the high regard Eisenstein had for Moussinac's critical perceptions. After the publication of Moussinac's *Cinéma Soviéétique* in 1928, Eisenstein wrote

I am most acutely grateful for your book which I have received and which pleased me greatly. The distinction between Pudovkin and me – 'song' and 'scream' – is superb and testifies to great insight. (p 24).

In other letters Eisenstein does make remarks about his own films, thus '*October*' is the dialectical denial of *Potemkin*' but these are snippets and, in general, this is what the letters provide. Snatches of information about Eisenstein's adventures in various countries, requests to Moussinac for a variety of reading matter (including a bibliography of books on slang), and comments on various film personalities ('William de Mille is cretinous beyond belief'). The best that can be derived from the letter is a sense of the texture of Moussinac's relationship with the great Russian and through this some sense of the man himself which is undoubtedly Moussinac's intention.

The essay, therefore, is less a work of criticism than a brief biography in which the familiar contours of Eisenstein's life are described through the personal reminiscence of Moussinac. It is not, however, devoid of the critical activity that would make it valuable for the student of Eisenstein's films though the insights tend to be embedded in the biographical text and have, in a sense, to be prised out before the student can actually make use of them. Also included in the main text are small passages from other writers on Eisenstein's films (principally Jean Mitry) but in general the essay is difficult to categorise. Most of the time it reads similarly to Marie Seton's biography<sup>1</sup> or Ivor Montagu's fragment of biography<sup>2</sup> but occasionally it moves into the real of Peter Wollen's essay on Eisenstein in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*.<sup>3</sup> The mosaic of intellectual influences that are Wollen's concern are evident in Moussinac's text though he makes little attempt to relate them to the films.

The introductory essay constitutes about one third of the book and, as is usual in this series, the rest is made up of a selection of Texts and Documents pertaining to Eisenstein. These include Moussinac's introduction to the French edition of *The Film Sense* which was never actually published, a selection of extracts from

- 170 Eistenstein's writings, excerpts from film treatments, and various comments on Eisenstein's art.

But, perhaps, the most interesting section of this part of the book lies in the reprinting of material concerning the film *Bezhin Meadow* begun by Eistenstein in 1935 but never completed by him. The documents are passages from Boris Shumyatsky's statement as Director of the Soviet Film Office justifying his decision to halt further work on the film, and Eisenstein's autocriticism, 'The mistakes of Bezhin Meadow' which was published in the Moscow review *Literature International*.

Shumyatsky discerned in the film a 'totally unjustified concern for "refinement"' which we might interpret as stylisation. As an example, he cites the way in which Styopa, the main hero of the film, is presented in certain shots surrounded by a halo. This is familiar ground. Stylisation, religiosity, a retreat from 'the real'. Wollen<sup>4</sup> has noted how the Stalinist attack on Eisenstein with its unargued index of realism has peristed through to modern critics such as Charles Barr and Christian Metz and although his answer is that 'Realism has always been the refuge of the Conservative in the arts', what is really required, in order to meet this familiar critical challenge, is a searching conceptual analysis of realism in the cinema. One ground of study might be Eisenstein's contemporary Dziga Vertov whose Kino-eye group of film makers were pursuing their own conception of reality through films while using a battery of techniques ['ultra-rapid motion, micro-cinematography, reverse motion, multiple exposure, foreshortening etc' – Vertov's words] which would surely cause problems to the hard-line realists. Yet O. Brik writing in an issue of *Soviet Cinema* in 1926 proclaims

Vertov is right. It is necessary to get out of the circle of ordinary human vision; reality must be recorded not by imitating it, but by broadening the circle ordinarily encompassed by the human eye.<sup>5</sup>

This, at least, constitutes a fresh conception of cinematic realism to compare with the one offered by Bazin and his disciples, one in which what they may refer to as the deforming properties of the camera are utilised in the service of penetrating reality.

A second important problem raised by these documents is that of the social or political role of the artist. In the autocriticism Eisenstein ponders the error which led to the disaster of *Bezhin Meadow*. His conclusion is worth our consideration.

The mistake is rooted in the deep-seated intellectual and individualist illusion which beginning with small things, can subsequently lead to big mistakes and tragic outcomes. It is an illusion which Lenin constantly decried, an illusion which Stalin tirelessly exposes – the illusion that one may accomplish truly revolutionary work 'on one's own', outside the fold of collective, outside of a single iron unity with the collective....

A passage clearly inimical to traditional criticism of the arts in which the quality of the particular artefact is seen as a direct result of the untrammelled individualism which Eisenstein roots out as his mistake. The film critic, by and large, has seized traditional criticism and produced the *Auteur* theory, developing it to the point of an 'extreme romantic aesthetic of individual creativity'. Film, a machine art, a technological art should, in fact, pose problems for traditional modes of criticism as the German critic Walter Benjamin pointed out as long ago as 1936<sup>8</sup>. Much work remains to be done on formulating an alternative response, an alternative explanation of Eisenstein's autocriticism in terms of the nature of film as a collective exercise, and as a phenomena which is truly social in its mode of production and exhibition.

This last point brings me back to the central essay of the book which is clearly, for Moussinac, an exercise in devotion. He has made an attempt to expose Eisenstein, the genius, the man towering above others through his own personal recollections of him while the 'investigation into his films and philosophy' would appear to be located in the arrangement of the Texts and Documents section. My own view is that the most interesting documents clearly raise a number of questions which are relevant to the development of a satisfactory film criticism while the introductory essay is an interesting piece of biography. This being said, the book falls somewhat short of its subtitle; the investigation into Eisenstein's philosophy, we possess in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (P. Wollen), but the urgent investigation into his films still remains to be written.

T. RYALL

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4. Wollen, *op cit* p 56.
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November 2, 1971

Dear Sir,

The recent issue of *Screen*, Mr Hillier's spleenetic article on the North East Educational Film Project is simply another attempt to discredit the management of the British Film Institute. The fact that Mr Hillier was an employee of the British Film Institute when the article was written and published naturally appears strange to someone used to the more primitive morality of the North where loyalty to one's employers is still regarded as normal. Then, of course, we lack the cultural and moral infallibility of the metropolitan avant garde.

Mr Hillier began by saying that the North East Educational Film Project was important because, among other things, 'it involves large sums of public money'. The annual cost of the Project is in the region of £6,000 which, I understand, was the amount until recently of the annual grant by the British Film Institute to your own magazine. During the first year of our operation over 43,000 students and pupils attended nearly 200 separate performances from well over 100 schools and colleges in an area covering nearly 500 square miles. What have you given for the public money you spend?

Obviously, a scheme of this magnitude could not be motivated without considerable growing pains. I believe in many respects that this has been the most ambitious scheme in the use of film for educational purposes that has been started in this country in recent years. With a limited budget it has not been possible to erect a complicated administrative structure. We employ a part-time Project Assistant and a part-time Theatre Officer whose combined salaries would probably total less than half the salary of a single member of the Education Department of the British Film Institute. Whatever success the Project has achieved has been due to the work of this small staff together with the help of local teachers, education officers and well-wishers. From the side of the British Film Institute the work and encouragement of Martyn Howells, John Huntley and Stanley Reed has been invaluable.

Before receiving the grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation which gave the Project financial security for one year at least, local trade unions and firms responded to an appeal for contributions. This current year every single local authority approached agreed to give the contribution which the Honorary Treasurer asked of them. Directors of Education in the North East, which generally suffers an unemployment figure of twice the national average, have learned by hard experience to judge the priorities in any situation and compare relative costs. When Mr Hillier suggests

that our Local Education Authorities should invest in a 'multiplication of good viewing facilities in schools', he can have no conception of the relative costs involved. For any single school to attempt to mount only a few of the courses which we have organised would be timetaking for staff and would, in any case, represent the duplication of facilities and the underuse of capital equipment which many Local Education Authorities are striving to prevent with rising educational costs which can make even the adequate provision of text books something of a headache.

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As a member of the British Film Institute, Mr Hillier was allowed free access to the scheme although, to my knowledge, he has attended only a very few of our programmes and I suspect that he has talked to very few teachers in the area. Most of the criticisms appear to be based on priori reasoning founded on ex cathedra judgements. Nevertheless it is remarkable how much false information he has been able to squeeze into the short article. A brief selection:—

1. 'The Project began some two years ago when a local headmaster with an interest in films took the initiative in approaching the Tyneside Film Theatre'.

I believe I am the headmaster referred to. Mr Hillier is wrong in both time and initiative. The first pilot scheme was commenced as far back as 1968 and the initiative came from two British Film Institute employees — Mr Reg Campbell, Manager of the Tyneside Film Theatre, and Mrs Harris, Secretary of the Film Theatre.

2. 'At least one auditorium, sometimes two, is in use every afternoon'.

The last time the smaller auditorium was used by the Project at the Tyneside Film Theatre was in November 1970 — just over two months after the Project commenced. This alone demonstrates the fallibility of Mr Hillier's detailed study and critique; he is just one year out of date.

3. 'The CSE Course in Film Study is devoted to the study of film as film, as an art form in itself. Significantly perhaps, these are by far the least popular of all programmes offered by the Project'.

This course has never in fact been the least popular in terms of numbers. Naturally, one school had to initiate this study as it involved special registration of the course with the North Regional Examinations Board. Numbers, however, have been rising steadily and during this current term there have never been less than 200 pupils present for any programme in this course.

4. 'Most of the original Subject Panels designated to organise programmes seem to have lapsed'.

Where Mr Hillier obtained this information is remarkable because it bears no relation to the truth.

This current term the Art Panel, the PE Panel, the Science Panel, the Careers Panel and the History Panel have already met. Contact has been maintained with the Secretary of two others. Next term, for example, the Science Panel will mount a series on the problem of conservation. The Art Panel and the Careers Panel will be organising courses. We are continuing to programme suggestions made by the English Panel.

This hardly seems to justify the word 'lapsed'.

I realise, however, that the artistic conscience cannot be bounded by the mundane world of fact. To join issue, therefore, with Mr Hillier on the theoretical level, let me admit straight away that we plead guilty to having tried to carry out both our two original objects, one of which was to 'organise courses based upon the use of film for pupils and students in the North East'.

Mr Hillier obviously disagrees with this object. Yet it was known to all our subscribers - we even mentioned the kind of courses which we intended to organise. These are the very courses which Mr Hillier despises. Is it 'positively harmful' for pupils to see films of a set book which they are studying for examination purposes? Is it wrong to allow pupils to see a screen version of a Shakespearean play which they may never be able to see performed on the live stage unless they can afford to travel nearly 300 miles to London? Is it wrong for 'A' Level candidates in French and German to see films based on works of classical literature in the language which they are studying? It may be the only opportunity that these pupils have of listening to natives speaking their own language!

It is strange that not a single educationalist has made this criticism to us.

Again, Mr Hillier objects to 'literary academics' introducing programmes. Are we now wrong to allow pupils to listen to experts in their own field? These people are professional educators who have kindly given their services free of charge. Mr Hillier 'has the feeling that they tend to look like prestige occasions'. Why? Because we try to get the best? Obviously the quality of films which we use will vary. Very often there is only one version available to us of a particular film. We are criticised for screening films 'regardless of age or quality'. I would not regard the age of a film as reflecting upon its usefulness provided that the print is in a reasonable condition. When Mr Hillier suggests that there is evidence that 'Teachers use set book films as a way out of the problem of getting pupils to read the books' we would be most happy to examine his evidence. He admits that he is thinking 'Not only of Tyneside' which implies that this also happens on Tyneside. I defy him to produce a shred of evidence for such a piece of impertinent libel on members of the teaching profession. If this were the case in any school examination results would very quickly demonstrate the inadequacy of the work of

such teacher.

To be accused of 'a rather unbendingly Reithian principle' might equally be regarded as a compliment. Lord Reith made the BBC in his day one of the greatest educational forces in the land and my generation owe him a great debt of gratitude. I believe it is still valid to expose pupils to great art and if the cinema can help us in this task it fulfils a most valuable role. Therefore, when Mr Hillier asserts that this is 'exposing them to great art (rather than to the cinema)' he is creating an illusory antithesis.

Our music programmes have been introduced by a music organiser of one of the Local Education Authorities. He did not share Mr. Hillier's 'very serious doubts about the way in which music is taught' in the schools which sent senior pupils to our programmes. Similarly, Mr Hillier's doubts about our religious programmes have not been shared by the professional clergy.

It is true that on some occasions the film content in a programme is small. Nevertheless, in these cases our Project is making a contribution to educational efficiency by preventing the unnecessary duplication of efforts in Careers teaching. It is certainly not true to say that often where the film content is fairly small that the films can be obtained by any school 'cheaply or at no expense'. Some of the films screened in the PE series were brought by the speaker himself, who was often a national authority in his sport.

The question of evaluation is naturally difficult. It has never been our intention of interfering with the work of the schools or trying to evaluate the work of teachers in the classrooms. This interference would be rightly resented by any school. We aim to provide a service to the schools and colleges and if this service has been used and continues to be used we think we can claim some success even though we realise there is still room for improvement in the service which we provide. Negotiations have already opened with two Local Education Authorities to organise an in-service course for teachers on the classroom follow-up of visits to the cinema.

Since the beginning of the Project we have attempted to canvas the views of teachers and this is one of the most important tasks of our Theatre Officer. Local Inspectors have helped us by making their own enquiries for their education authorities do not give grants without checking to see that the money is well spent. The range of our courses has been so great that each has presented its own particular problems in evaluation. The mechanics of the Project are important as the mechanics of every educational object. We have initiated on Tyneside the study of the film as an art in the schools which even Mr. Hillier acknowledges. This, however, is not our only object, nor indeed our main object. We are exploring the use of the film in many aspects of the educational process in the sense that it can be an educational tool like the blackboard and the overhead projector. Of course it is 'dis-

176 pensable' – so is the blackboard. Teachers are well aware of the difference between the necessary and the desirable. As they become aware of the extent of our Project and realise that it will become a permanent institution they will be able to plan ahead for the full use of the facilities which we offer. This is why we have been so concerned to send programmes out to schools in good time – one of the mechanics which Mr Hillier so despises.

When he categorically states as a result of his profound study that our Project will fail, bringing with it a reflection on the British Film Institute for its support, we begin to see the real truth behind the article. This Project owes nothing to the Education Department of the British Film Institute. We have never attempted to subordinate our aims to their esoteric dogmas. The film industry was never established by these latter-day school men in their ivory tower at Dean Street. We have tried to examine the practical advantages of the use of film in a wide range of educational activities without asking for huge sums of public money. We have had to convince educational administrators in Whitehall and in the Local Educational Authorities about the value of our work and, above all, the teachers in the schools. This is something which the Education Department of the British Film Institute should have been doing years ago. They failed and Mr Hillier must take his share of the blame for that failure.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Gray

Hon. Secretary

North East Educational Film Project

To the Editor:

Given the length, haste, and condition of my manuscript ('The American Film Institute') it is not surprising that a few errors escaped final editing; perhaps I can correct them here.

P 64, first paragraph, last line of the *Implementation* section, a line has disappeared; the last portion of the final sentence should read: '... authority to make decisions *necessary at those levels has often been withheld by top management; specific responsibility for decisions is consequently difficult to assign*'.

P 65, paragraph 4.13: 'Foundation grant of \$150,000 over these years' should read ... over *three years* ...

P 80, paragraph 4, thoughtlessly overlooks the work of Ann Schlosser, Center librarian, whose considerable skill in film research and scholarship has always been generously shared with Fellows and film students in general.

P 83, paragraph 8, last line, should read '... as MPAA at about this time withdrew its *financial* support of the AFI'. I'm sure MPAA continues in its general support of AFI despite the discontinuation of its funding participation.

P 86, first paragraph of the *Outcry* section, Prescott Wright's

letter is dated February 1, not January 1.

P 92, final paragraph, line 5: 'behind this stupid administrator's . . . originally read, 'behind this studio administrator's . . .' Not that I don't think it's stupid, but rather, that I was trying for a specific association with Hollywood production mentality's thought and practice.

In closing, it should be mentioned that despite the considerable challenges to AFI in the recent press, the Institute has not felt the need to justify or explain itself, nor has it issued the complete financial accounting it had promised for the month of July. George Stevens, Jr, as I understand it, has removed himself from the Beverly Hills Center, where to my surprise he had been Dean of the Center for Advanced Film Studies, and has been succeeded in that office by Frantisek Daniel. It also seems that no new faculty has been added to replace faculty lost throughout the 1970-71 academic year, although some Fellows at the Center have been given the suggestion that AFI's Center is in the process of becoming an accredited institution of higher learning.

Best regards,

Richard Thompson



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